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ht 1912 by ALEX EBIN.

“MARRIAGEABLES”

A FARCICAL COMEDY

From Modern Life In New York—In Three Acts

By ALEX. B. EBIN.

Author of “Arbitration,” “Roosevelt,” “Portia in Politics,” “Fedia,”
“Opportunity John,” Etc.

CHARACTERS:

1. CHRISTINA-MESUMEN-LAWTON, WidowAge 45
 2. LOUISE-REIZEND-LAWTON, Her Daughter.....Age 22
 3. MAXIE-LEBEDIG-LAWTON, Her Son.....Aged 18
 4. BELINDA FROELICH, Their Colored Servant.....Age 35
 5. TOPSY, Their Dog.....Age 2
 6. ROBERT EMERSON, an American Actor.....Age 30
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The action of this play takes place in Mrs. Lawton's Harlem Flat in
New York, Spring of 1910, at the Time of the Actor's Fair.

First Act—About 6 P. M. on a Monday.

Second Act—Afternoon of the next day.

Third Act—Evening, the day following.

“A laugh at everything and a kind word for everybody.”

MARRIAGEABLE

ACT I.

Mrs. Lawton's apartment in Harlem, New York.

The interior of a modern flat with all the latest improvements.

The stage is divided into three parts, or rooms, differing from each other in decoration and purpose of use, but there are no dividing doors, only draperies and partitions at both ends.

Dining room right, papered in red, woodwork and whitewashed walls above. Next to it is the library papered green, with mantelpiece C. and ornamented bookcase, furniture to match.

Adjoining the library is the alcove with door at extreme right, leading into two adjoining narrow halls: one R. leading to the interior rooms, the other to the outside stairway and Maxie's room. Through the open, drawn curtains, the alcove is only partly visible.

In the dining room and library the doors are at extreme left, leading into the interior hall of the flat.

On the right of dining room a door leading into the kitchen, which door is only partly visible.

The Dining room furniture and decorations consist of table centre and four chairs near walls. A sideboard with silver and cut glass on the right.

A chandelier of combined electric light and gas fixtures above table centre. Electric button on wall near door, left.

A display of ornamental plates and crockery on the woodwork all over the room.

In the library a writing desk on the right with chair near by. On the desk a telephone, large photograph of an actor in character costume near it, waste paper basket underneath. A few portraits and small mirrors on the walls.

Through the partly drawn draperies of the alcove, the open door leading into the adjoining halls as above is plainly visible.

The floors are of hard wood and polished. Rugs in good taste in all the rooms.

Everything indicating the life of people who do not depend upon boarders for meeting running expenses.

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1912 As the curtain rises Belinda is discovered in the dining room near centre of table, facing audience. Her age is about 35. She is in good spirits, good humor, and in the best of health. She has been employed for sometime by Mrs. Lawton and enjoys the confidence of all members of this little family.

Humming a coon song, Belinda lays the table for three, walking towards sideboard from time to time and bringing all requirements of the table, which include table cloth, knives, forks, cruet, napkins, plates, bread and butter, milk, cream, etc.

Assuring herself that she is alone, she helps herself to some cream, which she pours into a glass on table before drinking, leisurely refilling the pitcher with water, [eying the milk pitcher] de milk will stand some more water.

[Enter Mrs. Lawton] a good looking and well dressed, dignified American woman of forty-five, a good and loving mother.

She carries near-sighted eye glasses on a gold chain, of which she makes very frequent use throughout the play. Is good natured when obeyed, but easily irritated.]

MRS. LAWTON [Examining things on the table, sniffing the butter, then examining the cream, critically]. The cream is watery.

[Noticing the milky glass, then lifting it suspiciously]. You look guilty, Belinda.

BELINDA [Caught with the goods, nervously]. Am such dings to be did by me? I guilty, no...no, mm, no...mm...dats just what I isn't. The Janitor ain't no more as he used to was, an' what I says am oil from de can Yeas! Mm...

MRS. LAWTON. The idea of dragging in the janitor. Hurry up, and don't forget Topsy, the poor dog was almost starved yesterday. [Consulting her watch]. It is after 5, the children may return from the actors fair at any moment.

BELINDA. Yeas mam, yeas mm, lan' sakes, I didn't know it was so sune as dat! [Complainingly, busying herself around the table]. What a lot of time and money Miss Louisa have spent at dis heah fair! [Thoughtfully]. Dem hectors and hectorsesses ought to be able to take care of demselves, dats what I says! [Getting hold of the pitcher of cream]. Yeas-mm...yeas-mm...

MRS. LAWTON [Adjusting the table cloth]. You are a goose! It is a great thing this fair, and it serves a great purpose...[again consulting her watch]. The children should be here by now. I smell the potatoes burning.

BELINDA. Yeas-mm, yeas-mm! [Exits, hurriedly].

[Enter Maxie in out of door clothes, carrying hand-bag, opening it and depositing on table, many articles, representing his immediate purchase at the fair, including a fair programme, national flag, etc.

He is a bright American boy of 18, unusually clever for his age, kissing his mother, removing his overcoat, Mrs. Lawton assisting. Maxie's suit is of a striking material, showy and stagy, which once seen is never forgotten.

MRS. LAWTON [Inquiringly]. And where is Louise?

MAXIE [Playing with a fair medal in the lapel of his coat, then nervously clutching the tablecloth]. She could not tear herself away from... [Coughs]... a lady... [emphatically] an elderly lady, she has met at the fair!... [Takes his seat at the table, left centre.]

MRS. LAWTON [Right centre, handing him some tea]. Is the fair still crowded?

MAXIE [Taking the tea, then drinking and helping himself to bread and butter]. More than ever, jammed, jammed to the full capacity of the 34th Street Armory.

ENTER LOUISE.

MRS. LAWTON. Ah here is Louise. [Louise is a bright, handsome young woman of twenty-two dressed in out of door hat and coat. Her dress is the prize of the fair, won by her in competition, displaying her well proportioned figure to great advantage.]

MRS. LAWTON [Joining Louise, assisting to remove her overcoat]. Maxie says the fair is jammed, you must be tired.

LOUISE [Kissing her mother]. Yes, mother dear! The fair is still the attraction for beautiful ladies, beautiful gowns, and... worried men. [Removes her hat pins, hat, gloves, etc., then taking her seat at table C.]

MRS. LAWTON [Handing her some tea]. The worried men are not the kind *we* are after.

LOUISE [Taking tea]. Indeed not—mother dear. There were enough of all kinds to pick and choose, so many attractions [thoughtfully] yet Maxie seems to have done nothing else but buy dried apples from Lew Fields at the Country Grocery at one end and then go to the other end and drink water at the soda fountain of the Fortune Hunter.

MAXIE [Rather indignant]. I have employed my time and money to better advantage than you did, sis... [Exits.]

MRS. LAWTON [Watching Maxie off]. From what I hear, that Fortune Hunter Stand seems the centre of attraction at the fair. Speaking of fortune hunters, charity bazaars are certainly their paradise.

LOUISE [Some bread and butter suspended in her hand]. Surely mother, you would not have me reject a desirable acquaintance simply because our first meeting took place at a—bazaar...

MRS. LAWTON [Meaningly]. Desirable acquaintances are always welcome, but they are not easy to get.

LOUISE [Playfully]. Whom do you consider as desirable acquaintances?

MRS. LAWTON. Why, my dear, all the honorable professions, lawyers, doctors, promoters, or playwrights, particularly the latter. Yes, my dear, playwriting seems to have become the greatest of all professions. Millions are paid out in royalties by managers annually and they are run after more than any and all other professionals.

LOUISE [Playfully]. Of course, your list includes actors as desirable, actors and playwrights are practically the same.

MRS. LAWTON [Emphatically]. As you know my dear, I am not prudish, but the actor is the only profession excluded from my list of desirable marriageables. They live in their emotions and steamer trunks and rest as they rush.

LOUISE. True their profession has its disadvantages. They that live to please must please to live; to breathe the very atmosphere in which the character impersonated lived is not easy. But, mother dear, the actor has the advantage of lying late in bed in the morning.

MRS. LAWTON [Sardonically]. The revenue from lying late in bed will not keep a fly in clothes. What can the average actor sign his name for? Few of them ever acquire a competence. . . nothing in the world would ever induce me to accept an actor as a son-in-law.

LOUISE [On her knees, before her mother]. Mother dear, mother darling.

MRS. LAWTON [Excitedly]. Get up, you foolish child, you will spoil your best costume. . . [pause] . . . go and change your dress, my dear, my mind is made up! . . .

LOUISE [Sarcastically]. Why mother, darling. . . I have hoped that at least your mind was your own. [Exits]. [The kitchen buzzer rings repeatedly, Belinda shows herself at the door.]

BELINDA [Grinning]. Dat dreadful butcher boy buzzes and buzzes for his money! . . .

MRS. LAWTON [Hunting her pockets]. Dear, dear, I mislaid my pocketbook. [Pause]. [Noticing Louise's bag on table]. Ah, here is Louise's bag—I can borrow from her. [Opening bag, taking out some money and handing it to Belinda, but leaving pocketbook open, watching for Belinda's exit. Finding herself alone she takes out a closely written card from the bag, reading aloud]:

“Louise, Darling:

Together with the accompanying little token, I again offer you my hand and heart. Wear it to-day and I will know.

Lovingly yours, Robert Emerson, Actors' Fair.

This is an eye opener! . . . [Her eyes fall on the large photo on desk, —walks up to photo, taking it in her other hand and comparing the

writing: "Robert Emerson, character actor, Care The Lambs Club." Punching the photo].

So, this is the fine old lady that detained Louise at the Fair every afternoon this week and is also the mysterious sender of the flowers. Only last night I dreamt that I was held up by a stage robber, and to-day it is a terrible reality. [Calling] Louise! Louise!

[Enter Louise in changed, well-becoming dress.]

MRS. LAWTON. Everything is as clear as ink...ou need not tell me...I know...I know...the light first came to you when he kissed you in the dark. [Sternly pointing to photo and letter in her hands]. Surely, daughter, you will not put your finger in so loose a ring.

LOUISE [Playfully]. I like it loose, mother.

MRS. LAWTON. Don't forget, Miss, that *you* are my daughter, while he is a nobody. [Irritated]. Oh, what fools young girls are! [Tearing the photo into little bits and dropping into wastepaper basket]. This is my answer to this member of The *Exclusive Mutton Club!* I know all that I want to know about "Fly by the Night" and actors of shoe string companies.

LOUISE [Disheartened]. There is no use appealing to you, you never tried to help me, mother, never; anything I see you always let me want; and now you are depriving me of the only good chance I ever had; you are really.

MRS. LAWTON [Determined]. You know, Louise, that once I put my foot down, I stand on it...My daughter will marry a man who is somebody, not one who is merely acting somebody. I am your mother and to protect you is not merely my privilege, but my sacred right.

LOUISE [Irritated]. What do you want, mother...You are not going to kill me with your protection and your rights! One thing is certain, you don't love me.

MRS LAWTON [Pleadingly]. It is because I love you more than anything or anybody that I act as I do. Get this play actor out of your head...[Pause]...Don't waste time on getting the coupon when for the same effort, you can get the bond. I saw you looking at other photographs of this fellow, where are they?...I want to make a bonfire of them all while I am about it.

LOUISE [Haughtily]. If you want them, *find* them!...

MRS. LAWTON [Softening somewhat]. Don't think I am not trying to help you. Only yesterday I bought a duck of a hat for you, and when you marry the man of my choice, I will assign to you half of my income.

LOUISE [Protestingly.] Indeed, mother, you shall make no such

sacrifice for me, and I will marry the man I love. [Moves her jaws as if talking, unheard by audience.]

MRS. LAWTON [Emphatically]. You will marry the man I choose for you. [Handing Louise a morning paper with a marked advertisement] read!...as to the actor and his photographs [emphatically] I *will* find them. [Exits Mrs. Lawton.]

LOUISE [Alone, reading aloud, her eyes on ad.] As I thought, another advertisement, list of professions and eligible professionals. "Room, every convenience offered to Doctor, Lawyer, Promoter or Playwright; bachelors only [pause]." Everyone knows these conveniences. She is not a mother,—she is a business manageress!... Oh, the farcical tragedy of it all, the farcical tragedy of it all! [Despairing—punching the paper and destroying it—as she exits.]

ROBERT [From hall up stage]. Is Miss Lawton in?

BELINDA [From hall as above]. Yeas sir—she am, she am sir! [She accompanies Robert to the dining room door until his eyes and those of Maxie meet]. Lovely mornin' we is havin' dis afternoon, lovely mornin. [Departs to the kitchen.]

[Robert is a gentleman about 30, smooth face, refined, perfect features. His attire, a jacket suit, is in accordance with the latest fashion. Gloves and hat in left, and coat on his arm.]

MAXIE [Shaking hands cordially]. Sister and I are awfully fond of you, Mr. Emerson, you are so resourceful and all that, but mother...mother's views are entirely different. There has been a slight domestic breeze, and mother threatens to forbid you the house. ...you are not on her list of marriageables...You are only an actor!... [Enter Louise, carrying some roses, which she places on the table.]

LOUISE [Greeting Robert distantly—placing roses in a vase]. Maxie is right; mother is terribly prejudiced against you and your class.

ROBERT [Passionately. Coming up close and getting hold of her hand]. I shall never, never give you up, never! You are everything to me, everything!

LOUISE [Freeing herself, handing him a rose]. It is very kind of you...Robert...but...all the same, I am afraid...You see mother...

ROBERT [Disappointed—placing rose in his buttonhole]. Then everything is off, and I can't marry you after all...You don't want to see me.

LOUISE. Not happy to see you [embracing him]. I will prove it to you [kisses him].

ROBERT [Kissing her in return]. To me heaven is where you are, darling. I see before me nothing but your face. I love you,

Louise, love you more than anything, everything else in the wide, wide world.

LOUISE. But my dear Robert, mother is frightfully prejudiced against actors. [Picking up from floor the torn pieces of newspaper and showing them to him.] You are not on mother's list of professionals; she will not consent. . . and what mother says goes.

ROBERT [Turning around and noticing the torn parts of his photo in waste paper basket]. Too bad. . . but is there no way out of it?

LOUISE [Earnestly]. None, and if she sees you in her present frame of mind I fear something terrible will happen! . . .

MAXIE [Knowingly]. Mother is ransacking my room for actor photographs, which she says she must have and destroy. [Pause.] I have not seen her in such a furry ever since Stegliz, her stock borker, had her in a corner and squeezed her. . .

ROBERT [Distracted]. Am I to give up all hope of marrying you, Louise, Louise?

LOUISE [To Robert, meaningly]. No, no! Whatever happens, I love you, and if she wouldn't give me to you, you will kindly take me all the same. [Pause.] But you had better go—mother must not see you today.

MRS. LAWTON [Calling from adjoining room]. Maxie! Maxie!

MAXIE [Excitedly]. Presently, mothere, presently! [To Louise, excitedly]. Mother is in my room and the door is open; he can't go out without being seen by her, yet mother must know absolutely blooming nothing.

LOUISE [Distracted]. This is awkward. . . It's breaking my heart!

ROBERT. Mine is already broken. . . Something must be done.

LOUISE. And quickly!

MAXIE [Inspired with a new idea]. Pretend to be something or somebody else. . . You are an actor; this should be easy to you, and she has never seen you, except your photo with the beard on, in the "Three Twins."

LOUISE [Taking kindly to the idea]. Impersonate a lawyer. . .

MAXIE. Or a promoter. . .

ROBERT [Critically]. Lawyers and promoters are not in your mother's line. She will make me move at once, and I am particularly anxious to stay on and get nearer acquainted.

LOUISE. Wait, I have it—a doctor!

MAXIE. Yes, this is fine. [His hands to his stomach.] I have taken sick, and if Dr. Emerson would only live up to his professional reputation. . .

ROBERT [Proudly]. Leave it to me. [Clinching his fists.] I am waiting for you, my future mother-in-law...

(MAXIE dances about the room displaying his fine spirits, in anticipation of the good treat in store for him.)

LOUISE [Interrupting; noticing in the mirror that Mrs. Lawton is returning]. Mother is coming; quick, Maxie, quick! [Robert gets hold of Maxie's hand as Mrs. Lawton enters.]

ROBERT. Do you get me, Steven?

MAXIE. Sure, Michel; I am wise, *I am wise*.

MRS. LAWTON. Not a trace of the photographs anywhere. [Noticing the stranger holding Maxie's hand and examining his pulse.] Who is... What is this gentleman?

LOUISE [Introducing]. This mother dear, is a doctor... Doctor Foolthem.

MRS. LAWTON [Inquiringly]. Is he a Doctor of Divinity, a Doctor of Law, or a Corn doctor?

LOUISE [Gaining courage]. A doctor of medicine!... [Pointing to Maxie.] Maxie has suddenly developed serious stomach trouble and... I have telephoned!...

MAXIE [Putting his hair up and standing in grotesque position, his hands to his stomach, growling]. Oh, I, oh, oh, I oh!...

MRS. LAWTON [Eyeing Maxie; then to Louise approvingly]. Quite right, my dear, a stitch in time saves nine.

ROBERT [Sternly, with the air and dignity of a professor; squeezing hard Maxie's hand, making him jump]. You have sent for me just in time... [Removing Maxie's coat and vest, then knocking him about. Placing his ear close to Maxie's chest, listening to the beating of his heart.]

(While Robert examines his heart action, Maxie relieves Robert of his watch and all other small articles in his waistcoat pocket.) [Picture..]

MRS. LAWTON. How is it possible, if I may ask, for a downtown physician to understand a Harlem indigestion?...

LOUISE [Gaining confidence]. The doctor is also a resident of Harlem, not far from us... this, mother dear, is the famous Doctor Foolthem, the distinguished scientist, who is so thoroughly independent in his methods of treatment... Broken bones unite at the sound of his voice, and disease loses its force in his pre-eminent presence... He has carefully and thoroughly diagnosed the case...

MRS. LAWTON [Curtsys]. I am sure we are very fortunate in obtaining the services of so eminent a celebrity.

ROBERT [Bows]. Thank you, thank you, madam!... Your son is an impatient patient, but I instantly put my finger on the direct cause. [Pause. Placing his pencil, which looks like a thermometer

on Maxie's neck, then examining it, as if taking his temperature.] Ah, madam, your boy shall be treated as if he were the President's son, and even if you don't act on my advice, I will consent to taking my fee!...

LOUISE and MRS. LAWTON [Together]. Thank you, doctor! [Then Mrs. Lawton]. Tell me, tell me, doctor, you who are so learned and skillful, what has he got?

Robert [Pointedly]. Money!...

MRS. LAWTON [Dubiously]. Is his illness serious?

ROBERT [To Mrs. Lawton, placing himself in attitude extending right hand]. Never give up hope until you have consulted me; then, then give up everything. Serious? No. [Reassuring.] It is quite an ordinary case of scientific carving, an ordinary case of appendicitis. [Aside.] Appendicitis with money!

MAXIE [His hands to his stomach, growling]. Hell Columbia! An appendisawdust! Oh, I oh, oh, I oh! an *appendisawdust!*

ROBERT [Reassuring]. It is a matter of ordinary daily routine with us...A little ether, a few cuts and your pocketbook is removed [correcting himself], I mean his appendix!

MRS. LAWTON [Unnerved]. An operation, an operation? Must it be an operation?

ROBERT. How well off are you?

LOUISE [Comforting]. A little chloroform will not hurt, Maxie.

MAXIE [As above]. Oh, I, oh!...Oh, I, oh! An *appendisawdust*, an *appendisawdust*, and chloroform! A nice business!

MRS. LAWTON [Bewildered]. Chloroform!...Did you say chloroform?

ROBERT [Soothingly]. Yes, madam, chloroform has made modern surgery painless; nowadays to be operated upon is a luxury in sensation!...People go to the operating table as they go to the opera—it is the fashion!...

MRS. LAWTON [Surprised]. A fashion in operations!

ROBERT [Reassuring]. Quite so! Your son shall be operated upon in accordance with the latest fashion! I guarantee it.

LOUISE [Consolingly]. Maxie has felt stuck up ever since he first took a drink from a bottle of mucilage. [Pause.] I feel sure that an operation will make another man of him, after all that stuff has been removed and cut out. A week in bed will do him a world of good! We can at least try it...

ROBERT [Seriously]. We must guard against blood poisoning, and frankly, as a young physician, I need both the money and the experience.

MAXIE. By all means let us try it. [Changing his expression to that of gaiety.] I have always been looking forward to an opera-

tion and now I am glad it has come! . . . I shall be delighted to be the object of constant care and anxious attention. Above all, I will have something to talk about!

LOUISE [Playfully]. I don't see why Maxie should be operated upon and I shouldn't. I want to feel that sensation of happiness, that exalted peace and illumination which come to one during those days when all the loving ones are around you, looking on you with kindness and compassion.

MRS. LAWTON. Don't be foolish, child. [To Robert]. Perhaps an operation is better than merely pouring medicine, of which one knows little, into a patient of whom one knows less.

MAXIE [Hand to his stomach, as if suffering from intense pain]. There is one thing, I beg of you doctor—don't leave any articles or instruments in the stomach. Don't by chance sew up your stethoscope, your watch, or even your sponges! . . . [Bending down.] It is such a bore when people call on you for lost articles . . . you know . . .

MRS. LAWTON [Nervously]. Now, now, doctor, is an operation really necessary?

ROBERT [Examining Maxie's heart action]. I guarantee that once the operation is performed nobody will ever be able to prove that it was unnecessary. [Emphatically.] I am your physician and you have to trust me; you have no other alternative. All the symptoms are at hand: a loss of appetite after eating, and he sleeps with closed eyes, he tells me.

MRS. LAWTON [Admiringly]. Ah, medicine is the greatest of all professions.

ROBERT [Proudly]. Yes, rather. My cure as well as my medicines are absolutely guaranteed. I *guarantee* to cure your son.

MRS. LAWTON [Encouraged]. Ah, doctor, you give me comfort, reassurance—something to clutch at [pause], still, I confess, I am somewhat afraid of the knife.

ROBERT [Firmly]. Believe me, madam, in all such cases the knife is the real remedy—the only thing! When in doubt—operate. The only operations I ever failed in were on the Stock Exchange.

LOUISE [Cunningly]. Doctor, you said ether; this, of course, will necessitate the attendance of another physician.

ROBERT [To Louise]. Quite correct. [To Mrs. Lawton.] The whole thing, everything included, will only cost you a hundred dollars [pause]; I will make an exception to my rule and pay the assisting physician from my fee.

MRS. LAWTON. This is generous indeed! . . . Thank you, doctor.

MAXIE [Ashy pale, passing his hand over his face]. That stomach pain is driving me crazy, if indeed I am not crazy already. [Replacing hands to stomach as above.]

MRS. LAWTON [unnerved]. [To Maxie, embracing him.] My boy, my poor boy. [To Robert.] Save my son, doctor; save my son.

ROBERT. I knew perfectly well when I came here that I could make better use of a hundred dollars just at present than your son ever could of his appendix. Now, now [displaying a large carving knife], when is this interesting little affair of ours to come off [Pause], when do we blast...I mean operate. Shall we say this evening?

MRS. LAWTON [Laboring under a great strain to conceal her emotions]. Don't think for one moment, doctor, that I am prejudiced or old fashioned...I see very clearly that an operation is the very thing and all that, yes—but just at the present the moon is in the last quarter, while I want my son to be operated upon at the beginning of the new moon!...

ROBERT [Sympathetically]. I don't blame you in the least. It is a vital point and quite thoughtful of you; it would be better, but you must not forget that your son had his stomach in his boots as I came in and his temperature [excitedly], his temperature was one hundred in the neck! Yes [pause], these things don't wait, you know!

MRS. LAWTON [Excitedly]. I will pay you \$200 if you save my son without an operation [Breaking down]. Oh, doctor, doctor, is there no other way?

MAXIE [Aside to Robert, his hand on his shoulder]. If you get two hundred from mother I want half.

MRS. LAWTON [Searching for her pocketbook, finally finding and opening it, handing some bills to Robert]. And here, doctor, here is \$100 on account.

ROBERT [Taking the money]. This is business.

MAXIE [Unperceived by Mrs. Lawton tries to take the bills away, but is too slow for Robert, who pockets them. Then as his mother's eye meets his]: Oh, I, oh! oh, I, oh! Oh, my appendisawdust! oh, my appendisawdust!

ROBERT [Sternly to Maxie, using his lead pencil]. Let me see your tongue, son, your tongue.

MAXIE [Placing his hand on his mouth as if about to vomit]. Oh, doctor, doctor, no tongue could tell how badly I feel!...

ROBERT [Using lead pencil as a thermometer, which he forces into Maxie's mouth]. The temperature is very high.

MRS. LAWTON. Oh, dear, kind doctor, please save my son. All I have is yours if you will only save my son!

ROBERT [Proetstingly]. No, no, my dear lady, two hundred is quite sufficient...I am a man who has a reputation to maintain, and you will find that my charges are always reasonable. Say no more, please, or I may get offended and make you take your money back...

[Bus.] [He clears the table, then grabs Maxie by the shoulder, placing him in a reclining position on the table as if the dining-room table were an operating chair; lifting Maxie's arms and legs in turn, thumping Maxie on the back, then reversing the position and massaging his stomach. . . . [bus.] Let me see, Mrs. Lawton, have you a pump? [Gets a bath towel and ties Maxie to the table, the latter struggling violently to sit up.] If you make the slightest move during the operation I may never succeed in bringing you to life again.

MAXIE [Struggling to regain his balance and to sit down, moving the towel from place to place]. Stop your courtesies—a stomach pump and cold water—never, never, never! [Hands to his stomach]. Oh, I, oh! Oh, my appendisawdust! [Lifting himself up again.] I rise to a point of order! . . .

ROBERT [Forcing him down]. Lie down again at the same point!

MRS. LAWTON [Excitedly]. Maxie, this is going to cost me two hundred dollars. Better lay quietly and do as you are told or you will be cut up into little pieces. . .

ROBERT [Consoling, but holding Maxie down by the hair, nose and chin in turn]. It shall be as you wish, son. [To Mrs. Lawton]. We will try something else. Two hot water bottles and an onion porridge three times a day, an hour or so before the pain comes on, will do him a world of good, but [finding it difficult to hold him down any longer] first he should undress and be put to bed—a good sweat will do him a world of good. . . I may look in again later in the evening. [Unties the towel and lets Maxie off.]

MRS. LAWTON [Quite unnerved, accompanies Maxie to the door].

MAXIE [Protestingly]. To bed at this hour! By Jupiter, no, no! [To Robert.] You go to. . . [Exits.]

LOUISE [To Robert, reassuring herself that they are alone]. You did this quite well, my dear. . . I was almost afraid that you would overdo it! [Pause.] Poor mother, she is completely unnerved; you will have to reassure her before you go or it is us for a gloomy evening.

ROBERT. I will!

LOUISE [Thoughtfully, her eye on the advertisement]. Suppose you return later as someone or other [pointing to the ad] and try to cheer us up.

ROBERT [Thoughtfully]. How large is the supply of packing paper and twine in Maxie's room?

LOUISE [Reflectively]. Quite some!

ROBERT [Quickly]. Good, I will try! [Embracing her then walking toward the hall entrance, stopping at Maxie's door. To Mrs. Lawton] You must not disturb my patient, Mrs. Lawton, as you

well know it is nature that performs the cure. He must have perfect rest. Go to the dining-room and finish your tea.

MRS. LAWTON. Our tea is excellent. Will you join us, doctor, for a bite of tea and a sip of cake.

ROBERT [Playfully]. I should love to; sorry a confinement case on hand compels me to refuse. I must keep close watch on my patients, or else they all get well...

MRS. LAWTON [Disappointedly]. Duty first...But will my son get well, do you think? I am so worried...You have no idea [Interrupted]...

ROBERT. My dear lady, do as I do—take life easy!...[Exit Robert.] [Mrs. Lawton returns to the dining-room, joining Louise.]

MRS. LAWTON [Quite unnerved]. I hope it will all blow over without the necessity of an operation. It has knocked me off my feet completely. [Street bell rings; Belinda answers bell, returning almost immediately].

BELINDA. Mrs. Baked Beans, of Boston, our next door neighbor, wanted to know what de growling was about [pause]. I tol' her...

LOUISE [Cunningly]. One can't even be sick without your neighbors poking their noses...[The hall bell rings again.]

BELINDA [From the hall]. Whom may you be, please, sir?

ROBERT. My card. [Enter Belinda.]

BELINDA [Handing card to Louise]. A funny guy called; he am an houghter, a playwright, hellevatin' de drammar!...

LOUISE. Not so loud, Belinda, he could almost hear you. [Turning the card over to her mother.]

MRS. LAWTON [Reading card]. "Mr. Lymon Stonebrick, Dramatist." I am all upset tonight on account of Maxie; tell him to call some other time, some other time. [Belinda makes a movement toward the door, Louise detaining her.]

LOUISE. Oh, Christmas! This is not an ordinary professional, mother; he is a playwright; you may never get another chance; you may never...[Interrupted].

MRS. LAWTON. "Perhaps you are right; they are scarce. [To Belinda.] All right, I will come out presently and meet him in the hall.

BELINDA. Yeas, m'm; yeas, m'm. [Is about to exit.]

LOUISE [Indignantly]. Such treatment for an author!...Ask him in!...[Belinda exits and returns with Robert.]

BELINDA [As they are walking, sneezing and bowing]. Excuse my appearance, sir, but dis am 'Monday, our washin' day...yeas, sir, yeas, sir [grinning]. De apartment am furnished wid all sorts of modern inconveniences, as mrs. will tell yer. [Cleaning her nose

with apron.] [Robert has a mustache and goatee on. His clothes are the same as worn by Maxie during the previous act, a very poor fit and easily recognizable, but his manner of speech as he proceeds is direct, unaffected and engaging. In his left hand he carries Maxie's umbrella, and under his arms are neatly tied up bundles suggesting manuscript; other bundles of manuscript in his right.] [Mrs. Lawton and Louise pretend to be busy in the dining-room.]

ROBERT [Inquiringly]. What rooms have you?

BELINDA. We has two bedrooms; both is alike [pointing], 'specially de one on de right!

ROBERT. You seem to be well informed. [Hesitatingly.] Is madam a Christian?

BELINDA [Excitedly]. Oh, Lor, no—no, sirree! She am de widow of a Congressman... [Confidingly.] An' let me tell yyer, she am rich; she don't need no money—no, no... De apartment am nice, de landlady nicer, an' [whispering] she 'as a daughter [kissing her finger; noticing the glances of Mrs. Lawton and Louise; confused]. From 'ere de rubarbs of de city can be seen and reached in no time!— [Introducing.] *Mr. Lemon Stony-broke!*...

ROBERT [Bowing to Mrs. Lawton while fidgeting with his bundles, etc.]. My dear lady... I was sufficiently impressed with your advertisement, the outward appearance of your beautiful apartment—and—and—to warrant my venturing within. I am tired of living in hotels and being the constant prey of chambermaids and bellboys...

MRS. LAWTON [Relieving him of his bundles, which she places on table]. You are welcome, quite welcome. I am sure you will find apartment life an agreeable change. [Introducing Louise.] My daughter, Mr... Mr. [examining his card] Mr. Stonebrick, the playwright. [To Robert.] After you have inspected the apartment I will show you our novel bathroom.

LOUISE [Pointing to his umbrella]. Is it stormy outside, Mr... Mr?...

ROBERT [His eyes glued to his bundles, anxiously watching them]. No, no... but I always take special care when I carry my manuscripts with me. [Resting his chin on the handle of his umbrella.]

MRS. LAWTON [Encouragingly]. Quite right! Manuscripts are valuable; they are literally traveling gold mines, in typewritten covers, and are so very, very useful.

ROBERT [Playfully]. Useful? Useful? Oh, yes, sometimes!... [Lifting one of his manuscripts.] Only once has a manager seen something useful in one of my manuscripts; only once [pause]. That was when his stenographer placed a cheese sandwich between its

pages. [His umbrella gets entangled in the tablecloth and in the process of disentangling it several things on the table as well as his chair are upset.]

MRS. LAWTON [Playfully; lifting the chair and assisting him in straightening things out]. What kind of plays do you write, if I may ask? [Motioning Robert to a seat.]

ROBERT [Sitting down]. My plays are intended to be screaming farces! [Interrupted.]...

MRS. LAWTON [Admiringly]. Farces are the thing, you know!...An onion will make you cry, but no vegetable has yet been discovered which will make one laugh...

ROBERT. No, no vegetable, but the tickling of a feather will easily do it. Still, as I said, I strive to amuse and write farces.

MRS. LAWTON [Approvingly]. Quite right and very practical.

ROBERT. By the time I am half through with them they turn into tolerable comedies, but when finished managers' readers generally classify them as "*Cryable Tragedies*" and...and...[pointing to the bundles]...cryable tragedies they are, I assure you.

MRS. LAWTON [Playfully]. I see you are modest, your extreme shyness is in reverse ratio to your great name. [Again consulting the card.] Lyman Stonebrick, the great author. Stonebrick, Stonebrick!...[Confidingly.] You know at a charity entertainment my daughter once played in one of your delightful pieces...I don't recall whether it was in Lakewood or in Newport; all I remember is that it was a fashionable affair, and that the playlet was very clever...humorous and witty...the very thing we wanted—the very thing!

ROBERT [Bowing in acknowledgment]. You are very kind. [Gratefully.] Ah, little indeed does the public know what a long way a few kind words go to make us authors happy.

MRS. LAWTON [Playfully]. This is not a compliment; I am only stating the facts, I assure you!...It was an awfully cute thing. Louise just raved over it. [To Louise.] What was the name, dear?

LOUISE [Thinking]. Let me see [nudging Robert for assistance].

ROBERT [Thoughtfully]. Either "Air Castles" or "Bubbles."

LOUISE [Pointedly]. "Bubbles," exactly! "Bubbles" was the name!...

MRS. LAWTON [Playfully]. You are right, dear. I recall it distinctly and remember it perfectly now. [Proudly.] I have a younger son who will be a great playwright some day [Pause]; he dresses exactly like you! [To Louise.] Doesn't he, Louise?

LOUISE [Meaningly]. Yes, quite the same; in dress you look like brothers, only Maxie is too lazy to study. He generally averages three vacations of four months each three times a year...No, no one will ever accuse Maxie of excess baggage by way of education. When

he was little mother usually paid him money for being good; to-day he is *good for nothing*.

MRS. LAWTON [Plaintively]. I am sure I offer him every advantage!

ROBERT [Earnestly]. Evidently he does not want to take advantage of his own mother.

MRS. LAWTON [Playfully]. I am not a match making mother; I know nothing about this thing, you know; but if it should happen that my daughter falls in love with a playwright I shall indeed be very happy.

LOUISE. There is so much about your art that I am just dying to know! What is your opinion on modern American art?

ROBERT [Inquiringly]. American art!...Does it really exist? I always thought that the busy American has neither the time nor the inclination to form any views on art. He buys amusement as he buys merchandise, or, let us say, eggs at a grocery.

LOUISE [plaintively]. True, we are an art loving not an art producing nation. All we ask is that a play shall amuse. This should be easy.

ROBERT. Amusement, like everything else in life, changes its aspect and form. There is no guarantee that what amused us yesterday will interest us today or entertain tomorrow. Plays which amuse me personally would probably not pay for the lightning when produced even at the rate of ten dollars a ticket.

MRS. LAWTON [Cordially]. This is our tea time and our tea is fine. You will join us, wouldn't you?

ROBERT [Gallantly]. Delighted! Delighted, I am sure. [Taking out a card and writing hurriedly upon it.] Pardon me, a new idea has just presented itself and I want to write it down whilst I think of it. It is the finishing touch to my latest comedy, a creation sure to make me famous!... [Mrs. Lawton regarding him with admiration as he writes.]

LOUISE [Playfully; handing him a cup of tea]. Tell me, Mr. Stonebrick, tell me, are your stage characters drawn from life?

ROBERT [Pointedly, taking the tea]. My characters are composite types, the result of observation. I listen with my eyes more than with my ears. I let my imagination work so that I see the things I hear!

MRS. LAWTON [Sweetly; helping him with sugar]. What are your methods?...

LOUISE [A pitcher of cream in her R.; a plate of lemon in her L.]. What will you have—cream or lemon?

ROBERT. A little of each!...

MRS. LAWTON [Pointedly]. What is your purpose in writing?

ROBERT [Helping himself to lemon. Playfully; at his ease]. Sometimes I write to make people feel and think, to awaken them to their responsibilities. Again, as often I write to make them escape from thought and to forget their responsibilities. That is what farces are made for, you know.

MRS. LAWTON [Approvingly]. Quite right.

ROBERT [Earnestly]. Sometimes I dictate to my characters, but as often I am merely taking dictation from my characters. My watchword is always inspiration, but I am afraid that more often it is merely indigestion.

LOUISE [Passing along the bread and butter]. What are your methods of working out your themes? [Digging into his rib again, unseen by her mother].

MRS. LAWTON [Excitedly]. Yes, your methods? Define the principles which govern you as a playwright in your choice of themes.

ROBERT [Eating]. I am governed, not by principles, but moods. It comes to me unaccountably. Healthy playwriting is sane hallucination. The experienced writer can simulate inspiration, repeating gestures and copying tricks, but it is never quite the same thing.

MRS. LAWTON. But your methods of treatment. Surely they are not inspired!...

ROBERT. You are right there—method is different. I am governed by the thousand and one conditions and considerations of the theatrical mart, of which the box office end figures last but not least.

LOUISE [Summing up]. Speaking plainly, you take an idea, think over and consider it deeply until you have something worthy of portraying the idea; then you go to work on the plot.

MRS. LAWTON [Quickly]. Your plots, that's it!...How do they formulate themselves?

ROBERT [Laying aside his bread and butter]. Plot formulates itself in obedience to types!...Each and every play has to be treated differently and upon its merits, new problems requiring different handling and solutions.

MRS. LAWTON.. You should read all the new novels, it will do you a world of good.

LOUISE [Passing the cake]. Pardon me Mr. Author, are your ideas suggested by the characters of your plays, or your characters by the ideas?

ROBERT [Taking some cake and breaking it into bits]. Both happen, generally the characters control the situations (pause) if they don't bulk. When all is said and done, it is the trifles that make perfection, the little things, you know. Again, all the great love scenes which people enjoy so much after dinner, are generally written before breakfast.

MRS. LAWTON [Playfully]. It is all so very interesting. [Handing him another cup of tea.] The types and source of your plots and inspirations, what are they? How much time do you spend on producing a finished play?

LOUISE [Helping him with sugar bowl]. Do you encounter any obstacles in your work, and if so, what are they?

ROBERT [Continues dropping sugar in his cup, one after the other, to their amazement]. These are pertinent questions!

[Seriously]. Obstacles, of course there are obstacles. Without method there is no progress, with it, everything else is comparatively easy.

MRS. LAWTON [Passing the cream]. How do you write your plays, how? Come tell us!

ROBERT [Taking cream]. My dear lady—ask Edison how he makes his inventions, ask Carnegie how he made his money, or Mme. Melba how she sings—it is so much easier to ask questions than to reply intelligently.

MRS. LAWTON [Playfully touching him on the shoulder]. And why should there be any difficulty in replying...[Coquetishly]. Ah, I see, you don't care to let rank outsiders in.

ROBERT [Clears his throat]. Ask the eagle how and why it flies, the nightingale how and why it sings, the hen how and why he proclaims the morning? Ask anybody how and why he does the work that is given to him to do in this world. Like the needle to the magnet each is drawn to his special work and calling by natural forces and is as powerless to resist it as you and I to stop the shining of the sun. My plots come to me, that is all, and I write because I have to; I have seen sights and situations which have sunk deep into my heart and soul and have left their imprints, naturally all these impressions are longing for expression. My pen writes to express ideas which seem to me worth while, struggling after truth, striving to give the public something whose basis is life.

LOUISE. Ah, playwriting is indeed a great profession, and the modern stage a big factor in moulding public opinion.

MRS. LAWTON. Since managers are dependent upon playwrights for their plays, playwrights as such practically rule the situation of the country.

LOUISE [Playfully]. We are told that managers simply tumble over each other to get hold of a good Mss. [Digging Robert in the ribs, when she observes that her mother is not looking]. If the Mss. of a poor play contains but one idea, the manager takes the author and the idea...

ROBERT [Sardonically]. True, authors are being murdered with attention, and the outlook for the modern American playwright is replete with promise! If there is nothing today, what of it—there is

always a tomorrow—he is sure to land on his feet again, when his soles wear out!...

MRS. LAWTON [Smiling broadly]. I know you don't mean it. An author who says managers don't read or consider plays sent to them, doesn't know enough to write a play, at any rate, I am sure you are not that man.

LOUISE [Approvingly]. You are right there, mother, managers are looking for good plays as hard as they can, they all want them, they all need them [pause], the play is the thing, you know. Any man who can turn out even a half finished play has a great brilliant future before him.

ROBERT. Yes, the authors future is always rosier than the present, the eagerness of producing managers to obtain the Mss. of new authors is aggravating and the codling, quite true, is something awful!...

I wouldn't pay ten dollars for the best musical comedy Mss. in which our experienced managers invest ten times ten thousand dollars and make it pay. You see my point, the good play is an unknown quantity. I feel that their productions are no plays at all and they think the same and even less about mine. Again, authors are in love with themselves, they have no rivals. Every modern author considers himself superior to Shakespear, but his brother author, oh what a bore!... [Enter Belinda, bringing a fresh silver teapot.]

BELINDA [Excitedly]. Dat darn fool of a seltzer man lifted de dumbwaiter way above our floor, ringin, ringin, ringin! I opens de door an looks out an he bang, bang de dumbwaiter seltzer an all on me poor 'ead! [Her hands to her head]... Oh me 'ead, oh me 'ead, me poor 'ead... [Picture].

LOUISE [Examining Belinda's head]. In the future, Belinda, take care.

MRS. LAWTON [Angrily]. Don't interrupt me again. [Motioning to Belinda to withdraw, who exits with cold teapot]. [To Robert]. It is all my fault, I spoil my servants. It was provoking to be interrupted just when you were about to tell us... the secret of your song!

ROBERT [Shyly]. Characters interest me, people generally excite my curiosity, as for the rest, you will excuse me!

MRS. LAWTON [Coquettishly]. No! no! We will not take *no* for an answer, come now!...

ROBERT [Earnestly]. The real secret of modern playwriting centers around one thing only, the knack of getting what you have to say over the footlights, everything else does not matter; these are all the points of dramatic writing all in one—and one in all!

MRS. LAWTON. Of the real secrets connected with your work, you have said nothing.

LOUISE. You want to keep your little tricks of dramatic construc-

tion up your sleeve...keep us mere playgoers on the other side of the footlights...[Nudging him] tell us! How do you write your plays?

ROBERT [Protestingly]. As one of the public you should content yourself with results. [Placing his hands on his bundles and counting them as if they were in immediate danger of disappearing.]

MRS. LAWTON [Playfully]. Come tell us—we are simply dying to know. [Getting hold of one bundle and is about to unwrap it.]

ROBERT [Taking away the bundles, quickly]. Well, then,... Listen...Entirely apart from studying my own subject very closely, I see every play produced and study the market until I am convinced that I know what managers want and how they want it.

MRS. LAWTON. I see, you are a sly one!...This, of course, makes it easy sailing for you.

ROBERT. Well, not exactly, after chosing the subject on which I intend to write, I spend from four to six months of nerve racking on the Mss., and finally it is finished, a new play, a favorite child of my brain is ready to see the light.

MRS. LAWTON. And then?...

LOUISE. And then?...

ROBERT. And then, managers and their readers tell me that the successes of last season could not be repeated this year, that entirely new subjects and workmanship of a different character are essential. They don't know what is really wanted, but they are quite sure they don't want what I have to offer and another Mss. goes into the waste paper basket, for that is all they are good for, you know, and another year of strenuous life is charged up to life's loss account.

LOUISE [Sympathetically]. Possibly your plays touch the heart through the mind while our managers want plays that touch the mind through the heart. Ours is essentially a feeling public. Europeans think, Americans feel [pause]...

MRS. LAWTON. I have read in the papers that you cannot down a good play!

ROBERT [Inquiringly]. And what is a good play?

In Second Street the public and managerial conception of a good play is a page of Life, replete with conflict, which, as a rule, *starts* after marriage or, let us say, at the Church door. The more loaded a play is with long dialogues and a treatise on abstract philosophy, songs and recitations, boisterous acting and over-exaltation of the actors in their own lines, the more certain it is to carry over the footlights.

In Forty-second Street the desire for conflict may be the same, but in all other respects the conception of a good play from the standpoint of Managers and audiences, is diametrically the opposite. All conflict *must*, as a rule, *end* at the Church door; long dialogues never survive the very first rehearsals, abstract philosophy, which does not bear directly on the case in hand, is not wanted; and no West End author

could be even accused of the attempt at untimely songs and unwarranted recitations, nor a leading West End actor of laughing at his own jokes.

Between the photo plays of Third Avenue and plays as represented in the best artistic productions on Broadway, the distance is that of thousands of years in artistic study struggle and development, yet there is no dividing line, and the Third Avenue Manager is as persistent in the carrying out of his ideas of a play as the West End Manager in his. There is no ideal of taste, no other definite standard than the amount of ready dollars behind a given production.

Like the public, authors and play readers, managers are generally ignorant about the possibilities of a given play in Mss... The best judgment a manager exercises is only based upon his experience of the public's inexperience.

MRS. LAWTON. If managers don't know, who does?

LOUISE. I would like to find the "nigger" in the fence!

ROBERT [Earnestly]. The fact is that six youngsters employed as readers by our managers, generally decide the dramatic fate of our great country and less than eighty people supply the market for which eight millions are aspiring.

Again, our stage is in the hands of the speculative showman, managers conduct theatres for financial gain only; claims of art are not admitted and the dollar sign alone is the recognized emblem of dramatic success.

MRS. LAWTON. No; this is not the reason.

LOUISE [Playfully]. What then?...

ROBERT. Here is another—Few men, if any, outside the author are competent to judge the possibilities of a given Mss., least of all our leading managers and their readers. They have seen so much and read so much more that a joke which might appeal to the public as broad enough to be carved with a knife will never call forth a smile from them. To make a manager's reader smile, one has to send for Jimmy Valentine. Believe me, madam, that until a play has been in rehearsal for some time the only person who is enthusiastic about it is generally the author—on the part of all others it usually requires a great deal of confidence... A play practically does not exist until it is put on. An untried authors prospects of success are therefore in exact proportion to the number of his personal friends who are willing to back him, without reading his manuscripts.

MRS. LAWTON [Protestingly]. No, no, surely... What about our experienced producers?

ROBERT [Earnestly]. Study the market and you will find that practically no play which comes from men outside the ring gets a proper hearing. The Mss. which are sold are the products of play

readers, stage managers or husbands of favored actresses, all other Mss. are generally returned!...

LOUISE. I am afraid you are one sided on authors. Managers are compelled to consider only plays that meet with the requirements of the particular stars under contract with them.

MRS. LAWTON [Plaintively]. Besides, my good friend, the cost of mounting modern plays is great and the taking it off, if it is a failure, has to be carefully considered. A manager can't speculate 50,000 or so for the mere pleasure of pleasing a young author.

ROBERT [Triumphant]. I am not finding fault with individuals, I am merely pointing out conditions. Playwriting is a hard and dreary business at its best and a man who goes into it as a means of livelihood is a darned fool. A man who gambles on the race tracks risks one to five or one to ten, the playwright who gambles on his Mss. as a means of livelihood, in competition with the other eight million writers for the stage, risks a thousand times as much.

MRS. LAWTON [Her enthusiasm vanished]. Well I declare!

ROBERT. I am not complaining in the least I assure you. I have been reading plays for fifteen years including most of the plays which have been produced and made money, yet the only Mss. I was ever tempted to invest in, if I had the money, are my own!... Why should managers think more favorably of my Mss. than I do of their finished productions?...

LOUISE. Quite true!

ROBERT [Earnestly]. Nine hundred and ninety-nine out of each thousand of men and women who write for the stage must look for the reward in the work itself and find it in the doing. My plays are always a success as far as I am concerned, but it is only on rare occasions that they please others. For this reason I always keep my Mss. on the mantlepice near the fire, the only place where they are sure to receive a warm resection.

MRS. LAWTON [Relieving him of his cup]. I see, your profession is divided into two classes, successful dramatists, consisting of a handful of men who earn a living from writing for the stage and eight millions or so of aspiring playwrights who waste their time and good money on what may be termed as worthless effort.

ROBERT [Nods in approval]. Exactly, as far as financial returns are concerned.

[Belinda shows herself at the door, laboring under great excitement, but afraid to enter.]

BELINDA. Axing your pardon, Mrs.mm, mam, axing your pardon...

MRS. LAWTON [Angrily]. What did I tell you Belinda... didn't

I tell you?...[Stamping her foot, as Belinda is about to reply.] Hold your tongue, if you want to hold your job!...

BELINDA [Excitedly]. Oh, Mrs. Mme, mm, somethin awful, terrible! Maxie's stomach, mam; it's been growin' bigger and bigger [Showing with her hands its present approximate size].

MRS. LAWTON [Quickly]. Dear, dear, dear. I should never have allowed the Doctor to leave, I should have kept him here over night anyway! Oh God, how helpless one feels in all such cases with no doctor around to scold.

LOUISE [Nervously]. I have a sick brother in the house [rising] please excuse me [aside to Robert]...Get into the kitchen Bob, the washing blue is fine! [Kisses him, unnoticed by her mother.]

ROBERT [Picking up his bundles and umbrella in a great hurry—apologetically]. You have my profound sympathy...I am the one to apologize, excuse me, excuse me...I won't bother you to show me the room now, some other time, some other time. [Bowing to the ladies, drops his umbrella and while picking it up, he loses a manuscript, other Mss. drops to the floor as he picks up the first one, bus.] [Exits right. Topsy heard howling.]

BELINDA [From the kitchen]. Topsy, Topsy, soft pedal! Eh, dere! lookout for de washin blue, Mr. Houter, look out, look hout! [A noise of broken crockery soon follows—Topsy howling heard again.] Watch your step, watch your step, Mr. Houter.

[Louise exits.]

ROBERT [From kitchen]. Oh, that dog! O, that dog!

[Enter Belinda.]

BELINDA [Excitedly]. Oh, me, Oh my, de playwrights raised merry cane in de kitchen, broke his glasses an tumbled ober de tub of washin blue,—smashin de table crockery and upsettin' de blue all over de floor; gee wheeze, what a pickle.

MRS. LAWTON [Unnerved]. Well, upon my word, goodness, gracious, what an unlucky day, what an unlucky day...[Uneasy] Is the gentleman hurt? Is he injured?

BELINDA. No, no, he arn't, he only hurt his underspinner! But de kitchen floor, de kitchen floor mam, has been turned into a river of blue!...

[Robert shows himself in the door, freeing himself from Topsy, who hangs behind, holding on to his trousers.]

[Enter Robert, limping.]

[His broken eyeglasses hanging on his coat, the ends of his trousers and coat, gloves, sleeves and shoes are covered with blue, his trousers are torn near the knees. His Mss. are all wet and from them and the umbrella, blue is dripping.]

ROBERT [Depositing Mss. and umbrella on the floor and sitting down on chair in helpless position, nursing his left foot]. I am ruined! Oh, my sorrow is too deep for tears! [Snuffing]. Oh, my sorrow is too deep for tears! [Picking up umbrella, placing it between his legs, his hat upon it.] My sacred works and thoughts of a life time, like a child's snowball and the Spanish navy have been completely wiped out and vanished in a single careless moment! [Tragically.] My dramatic career is ended! [Snuffing].

MRS. LAWTON [Sympathetically. Throwing her handkerchief to him]. Why ended, say it has only just begun, you certainly have never looked more tragic [correcting herself] I mean dramatic in all your life.

BELINDA [Offering him paper and pencil]. So you is, so you is, sah, yeas sir, yeas sir [grinning] 'ere am a pencil, sir, an while your 'and am dryin', you may write wid your feet a new comedy [taking in the picture, grinning broadly].

ROBERT [Irritated, snaps his finger and lifts his right foot as if about to strike]. Bah, a tragedy, perhaps, a tragedy!...

[Topsy heard barking in the kitchen, Robert all excitement quickly mounts the nearest chair, examining his legs and trousers]. Watho she bumps! Oh, oi, oh, that dog!...Saying grace again; Oh, that dog!

MRS. LAWTON [Eyeing Robert contemptibly]. No siree, no playwright for me!...[Eyeing in disgust the mess on the floor]. He certainly has made an impression!...

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

Afternoon of the next day. Everything is the same as in the first act, only in the dining room there are four [three long and one narrow] patches of blue on the rug, where Robert's bundles and umbrella were deposited at the end of Act I.

The dining-room table is laid for three. A newspaper L. C., chairs near table R. L. and C. facing audience.

Belinda is discovered in the dining-room, putting finishing touches to the room generally, a small rug and a rug beater in her hands.

The telephone bell rings.

BELINDA [Placing rug and beater on the nearest chair, taking up telephone, holding the receiver at some distance from her ear.] Dat ti'some telephone a ringin' again...ring! ring! ring! [Finally adjusting the receiver to its proper position.] Whom am dar? Wal... What are it?...Yeas!...Am I dar?...No, I'se not dar. [Excitedly] I'se here, can't you hear, I'se here!...Yes, I'se all here!...Is I which? Is I Belinda? Co'se I is...yeas,...it am, so it am!...

Yo' am Jakson ob de livery stable...is ye? Wel, wal,...hollow chief! You was not at de watermillon patch last evening...No yo was not at Maiden Lane...Wal, wal, Jee-ru-se-lem am to pay, an' I ain't got no pitch!...[Pause] Did you say fowels?...yea—chickens, roosters...fowels!...no...no...I thought you did!...What...Dere am nobody in de world as nice as I is...You mean it?...Come again...Oh, you kid!...Come again. [Enter Louise.]

BELINDA [Excitedly at phone] Get off, get off de wire. You is at de wrong number.

[Belinda quickly hangs up receiver, picks up the rug and rug beater from the chair and resumes her work as above, cleaning chair with apron, then re-arranging things on table.]

LOUISE I say, Belinda...about the playwright...last night, the last caller, you know...Have you heard him?...[Taking her seat near the writing desk, the pen suspended in her hand, attracting Belinda's attention.]

BELINDA [Extending hand holding rug beater]. Has I heard him, of course I has!...He have gone right deep into his subject, like a hungry nigger into a bowl ob chicken soup!...[Grinning.] Talkin' about elkicuton!...

LOUISE [Irritated]. I am not talking about elocution, have you heard him *leave*. I mean,...tell me, tell me exactly what happened.

BELINDA [Replacing rug on floor]. When I dink of dis high haughtor, it makes mi blood like pinpoints...[Laying aside the rug beater.] Dat man will live long after de English language am forgotten and watermillions cease to grow in Jersey.

LOUISE [Irritated]. I want to know what happened—in the kitchen....

BELINDA. Oh, what a funny guy he am, an what a time I has had cleanin' up de kitchen!...Goodness gracious, [Pinning up the table cloth] I will neber forgit de hexident in de kitchen last ebening, as long as I remembers it!...[Putting finishing touches to the table, generally] Neber!...To begin at de conclusion [Correcting herself], to conclude at de beginning...[A spoon suspended in her hand]. I watched de feller out...after he massaged himself wid blue all over!...My word! He walks briskly, den suddenly stops, turns around, yeas, I was dere...he were all upset an as he reached de door says: "All my scripts lost, I'se ruined, Gee wis, what will become of de American drama!...Laugh, I though I would skreetch!..."

LOUISE [Sympathetically]. Poor fellow, if I only knew where he lives, I would send him a few barrels of ink and a few sheets of paper, just to get him started again!...

BELINDA [Excitedly]. Oh gosh! Don't you send him any blue ink, whatever you does, dat man am not to be trusted wid dis high blue liquid...

MAXIE [from hall]. Where the devil is that nigger?

[Enter Maxie, door L., wearing the rubber curtain of the shower bath in a nicked ring, his drawers show through the opening at end of buttoned up curtain [picture].

MAXIE. I will never lend anything to anybody as long as I live. Your actor friend...damn him! [Lifting his hand from within the curtain.] The best I've got out of yesterday's little affair is the worst of it.

LOUISE [Inquiringly]. Surely Maxie you have some other clothes?

MAXIE [Desparingly]. Sure, Sis...A closet full!...but what is the use?...The closet is locked, the key is in my waistcoat pocket and your actor friend has the vest!...

LOUISE [Consoling]. Robert will make good. Nervously] Don't let mother see you in this...[Pushing him out of the room.] Put on your dressing gown, anything, anything!

MAXIE [Returning]. Just think of my predicament. You say your actor friend will make good...Bah! Anytime I can do him good, I will "do" him good!...I will never lend anything to anybody...never...lend...[Pause.]...lend me a ten-spot. [Extending his hand.]

LOUISE. Be calm, dear, be calm. You have my sympathy.

MAXIE. Bah! [Desparately.] Hang sympathy, I don't want it...I want my clothes, my pants! [Bus.] My trousers! My pants!...[picture.]

BELINDA [Sympathetically]. Too bad your trousers ain't 'ere... but I is quite sure to find you a negligee shirt an' collar.

MAXIE. [Sarcastically.] That will help a whole lot...

LOUISE. [Tapping him on the shoulder]. You are a very promising young man, Maxie, considering the amounts you borrow, and you have such winning ways when you are not losing. I always liked you. Even when you were little you were constantly borrowing money to save up. I used to give you 10 cents for codliver oil every time you took it and...bought a new bottle for the money as soon as a dollar was reached. By the way, isn't it about time you paid me what you have borrowed?

MAXIE. Sis. darling, it is not a question of time, but a question of money!

LOUISE. [Handing him money, placing her hand on his left shoulder sternly]. Maxie, this time I am not lending [Maxie eyeing her questioningly], I am giving it to you!...

MAXIE. If I take no exercise I feel I will get sick in earnest [stretching himself]. Cooped up for two days and a night in that little hole! [pointing to bedroom]. I feel stiff all over!...[Making violent movements, dancing about the room, etc.]

LOUISE [Excitedly, getting hold of him]. Mother is coming.

[Exit Maxie Left.] [Enter Mrs. Lawton Right.]

BELINDA [Rejoicing]. Ah, 'ere am Misses.

LOUISE [To her mother]. Belinda was just telling me about the arrangement you made [Emphatically] with this interesting playwright.

MRS. LAWTON [Crossly]. I don't want to lead *him* astray into the paths of virtue. I hope he isn't where I wish he was—never speak to me of him again!

BELINDA [Approvingly]. Misses am right...What are he?... Oh lor, or lor, didn't he make me sit up when in de kitchen. [Pause.] I reely don't dink he am de right kind of a hairpin. De washin' blue am what I has again him.

LOUISE [Playfully]. He is all wrapped up in his art, art is the dramatists real mistress. Wouldn't you like to see me marry him, Belinda?

BELINDA [Displaying her teeth]. He am no class, no reefinement, nor heducation, no nothin'; you scrambled wid...dis: No, no, let him split his name wid some one else—I would like to see you marry an *aristo-cro-crat*, Miss, and become a Dukes!

LOUISE [Playfully]. I a Duchess. No Belinda, there is where you are wrong, I shall never marry a *Dutchman*. What is your opinion, Belinda, about married life generally?

BELINDA [Self-possessed]. Well, well, Miss, dat ar pends alto-
geder how dey enjoys demselves...What I wants to know am dis:
When a man an a feminine gets married, an dey ain't neider ob dem
got anyding, now, now to whom does de dings belong to...

LOUISE [Smiling]. This is a pertinent question.

MRS. LAWTON [Taking her seat at centre of table]. Stop talk-
ing nonsense. This will do, Belinda! Bring in the soup. [To Louise.]
Marry a playwright, indeed! If a man failed when he had but one
life to manage, how can such a man be entrusted with the management
of another? [Exit Belinda.] The wives and children of authors and
composers live in the kitchen of the imagination and their last compo-
sitions are generally compositions with their creditors.

LOUISE [Teasingly]. Possibly, possibly with authors generally
[Pause.] but playwrights, mother, playwrights are different. I can
name five men and one woman whose combined fortune exceeds a
million.

Mrs LAWTON [Sneeringly]. Six peple, among a ninety-million
population, or one in fifteen million, and this average is about right.

LOUISE [Protestingly]. You are wrong, mother, managers declare
that they may lose, but authors never, authors by the terms of their
contracts draw their share of the gross receipts all the time, success
or no success...

MRS. LAWTON [Assertively]. Which authors, the same handful
of people that can be counted on the fingers of one hand, but what
about the others. No, my child,...we will steer clear of ink...there
is nothing in it but iron and gall. I will have absolutely nothing to do
with a member of the scribbling fraternity. [Pause.] An author
should keep single.—It is the hardest of his tasks, but at the same time
the source of his strength. [Sneeringly.] Playwright indeed, nine
hundred and ninety-nine of each thousand, as I understand it, never
get anything!...

[The telephone bell rings, Louise taking receiver.] Yes, yes, Dr. —
—. We are perfectly delighted to hear from you...your patient,...
your patient enjoyed poor health the whole evening, but this morning
he complained of feeling better!...

MRS. LAWTON [Excitedly]. Tell him...tell him that he lay
speechless for eighteen hours during the night and his constant cry
was "Dr., Dr. don't leave your sponges behind..."

LOUISE [At phone]. Yes, he awakened in the centre of the night
..'How is he doing now? He is doing well, very well! [Pause.] He
likes taking medicine; it gives him something to do!...

MRS. LAWTON [Excitedly]. Ask him if Maxie is allowed to
come to the table or to have some solid food. [Aside.] Maxie is

artistic, but his appetite is not temperamental. [Sighs.] Ah, poor Maxie!

LOUISE [At phone]. Mother wants to know if Maxie is allowed to have some solid food?... [Repeating.] No, not just yet, but he may come to the table [Aside.] if he dares!...what!..' [Repeating.] Give him eighteen ounces of strychnine, mixed with 17 ounces of carbolic acid, repeat in half an hour if this doesn't settle him. Thank you, Doctor, [Smiling broadly] I will... I will do exactly as I am told!...

[Hanging up receiver—to Maxie through the door.] The Doctor says you may come to the table...

MRS. LAWTON [Thoughtfully]. The Doctor is a dear!

[Belinda wheels in Maxie in an invalid's chair and dressing gown, conveying in every respect his mother's impression about the seriousness of his illness. Maxie taking his seat at the table L. C.]

MRS. LAWTON [Nervously, petting him]. How ill you are looking, my boy, my darling boy!...

MAXIE [Coughing repeatedly all the time].

[Belinda brings him a bowl of onion porridge, then replies to a ring at the bell.]

MAXIE [Picking up plate and burning his fingers]. Gee, that plate is hot! [Lifting it with his napkin, gallantly to Louise.] Will you have some chloroform, I mean an appetiser, darling... I will share my last onion with you... [Pause.] if you like onions!...

LOUISE [Indignantly]. Certainly, certainly not! But I will have salt. [Uses salt, then empties the salt cruet into his porridge.]

MAXIE [Excitedly]. You will spoil my medicine!... you are heartless, perfectly heartless. [Belinda returns.]

MRS. LAWTON. Stop, children, you will ruin the tablecloth.

BELINDA [Grinning]. It was only de neighbor, Mrs. Baked Beans of Boston, inquirin' how *young* Maxie is..

MRS. LAWTON. Very kind of Mrs. Beans. ..

BELINDA. I tol' her, I tol' her—eighteen. [Grinning.] She were afraid he would get off de handle an' go to Dixie land.

MAXIE. [Playfully]. You need not be afraid of my dying, [Pause.] It is the *last thing* I will ever do! [Holding finger on the point of knife.] You see the point?

LOUISE [Teasingly]. Maxie, you speak too much.

MAXIE. I will speak as long as I please.

LOUISE [Playfully]. You spoke longer than you please already.

MRS. LAWTON [Playfully]. Don't quarrel, children. [Eyeing them affectionately.] This looks like old times.

MAXIE [Examining newspaper near him]. No, it is an old Herald; I thought so.

LOUISE [Teasingly]. Maxie, you have but one joke and this is an old one.

MRS. LAWTON [Handing some apple sauce to Louise]. Louise, give it to Maxie.

LOUISE [Playfully]. I am giving it to him.

MAXIE [Gravely]. Good, very good, it couldn't be worse.

LOUISE [Playfully]. I am glad Maxie was in bed when the author called, or I am afraid... [Interrupted.]

MAXIE [Placing nicked dish cover on his head, as a helmet, taking tray in his left hand and a long loaf of bread in the other and straightening himself out to a fighting position]. A duel. [Waving the loaf of bread in the air.] A duel...if ever I catch the follow again. [Repeating his military advances and movements.] Just fancy a man "listening with his eyes, and seeing with the back of his head."

The hall bell rings. [Enter Belinda.]

MRS. LAWTON [In a temper]. The potatoes are burned!

BELINDA. Yeas mm, yeas mm!...I've tried a new experiment from de cook book you bought at de Hector's fair... [Despairing.]... I hope dem Hectors an' Hectoresses will use it to better advantage.

[The hall bell rings again, Belinda passes through hall and returns with card, handing it to Mrs. Lawton.]

BELINDA [Some time after handing the card]. A card for you, ma'am.

MRS. LAWTON. Shut up, you goose.

BELINDA [Pointedly]. He am a lawyer, also a gentleman, likewise honest.

MRS. LAWTON [Reading]. Mr. Always Delay, of the firm *Promise, Postpone and Delay*. [To the children, whispering in their ears in turn and motioning them to leave the room.]

LOUISE [As she exits]. Always Delay!

MAXIE [As he exits]. Always Delay!

MRS. LAWTON [Watching them off]. Tell me, Belinda, [Pointing towards the hall] how does he look?...Re-arranging things on table, powdering her face, etc., full of anticipation.

BELINDA [Whispering]. New clothes, an'...an'...you will see for yourself, Mm, I has took to 'im tremendous!...

MRS. LAWTON [Tidying herself before mirror in Library, to Belinda]. Show the gentleman in. [Exits door R.]

[Exit Belinda into hall and returns with Robert]

[He carries an imposing legal portfolio in his L. hand, two volumes of law-books in the familiar legal binding under his arm, and his make-up is in great contrast to his two previous impersonations.]

BELINDA [Excitedly]. De room am thirty dollars a month, sir, but she may make it forty for you. Dis am a large magnesia house, wid a

nice pizzaro an' a splendid lemonade all around de house... exactly five minutes from everywhere, an' within a stone's drow from here am de Subway.

ROBERT [Playfully]. Well, well, practically an absolute guarantee of good air, you know.

BELINDA [Emphatically]. 'Xactly! Yeas sir, yeas sir, it do, so it do! Only once has I been wid Mrs. to de country, an' de fresh air dere have made me positively sick.

[Enter Mrs. Lawton in changed dress. Belinda quickly exits.]

ROBERT [Depositing bag and law books on table. Bowing to Mrs. Lawton]. I am a lawyer and always like the party of the second part to be explicit, to reduce everything to writing, [Bows.] that is why your advertisement attracted me.

MRS. LAWTON [Admiring his imposing hand bag and books,—encouraged]. If I want anything, my motto is to go straight for it and get it!...

ROBERT [Busying himself with his portfolio, opening and closing it]. You know, it is the only way, and it is also my way! [Pause.] However, before discussing terms for the bedroom, I must know if it includes library privileges.

MRS. LAWTON [Apologetically]. Our library is sadly neglected, but such books as we have are at your disposal, cheerfully, gladly.

ROBERT. My reference was to library space [pointing to his books]. I have books of my own, *you know*.

MRS. LAWTON [Playfully]. Next to doge, cats and...men, books are cheerful companions. [Joyously.] The entire vacant space in the library is at your disposal, fill it up to the ceiling if you like.

ROBERT. [Measuring the distance between the ornamental mantel and wall]. This disposes of a fraction, *you know*, but the bulk of my books, where am I to place them?

MRS. LAWTON [In an accommodating mood, closing the library door leading into inside hall]. For your sake I will keep this door closed and you can fill up this space as well with books to the very ceiling [Smiling broadly.] and to your heart's content.

ROBERT. This disposes of about one-third of my legal library. [Pause.] What am I to do with the rest? *You know*...

MRS. LAWTON [Puzzled]. Good Lord, man, how many volumes have you?

ROBERT [Dubiously]. Thousands...

MRS. LAWTON [Left hand on her chest]. You take my breath away!

ROBERT [Measuring with tape the space between the walls and writing it down on a card]. Yes, mam, "A modern corporation is no

money surrounded by creditors and there is a special law for each and every creditor to show why his special account should not be paid!"

MRS. LAWTON [Earnestly]. You surprise me!

ROBERT. When Moses first gave the commandment of "Don't Steal", *in two words, you know*, it probably never occurred to him, that under a higher civilization so many thousands of volumes would be written and printed in favor of the party of the second part!

MRS. LAWTON [Surprised]. So many volumes in favour of legalized thieves!...

ROBERT. Exactly!...Gradually but persistently the industrial equipment of the nation has passed into the absolute control of a plutocracy leaving for the producers just enough to exist on, and all this has been accomplished and is being accomplished under the protection and operation of the law.

MRS. LAWTON. You astonish me!

ROBERT. In the great battles for economic independence the use of dynamite is not limited exclusively to America and the McNamaras. Indeed, it is sometimes used by terrorists even in civilized Russia. But in the methods of depriving the great mass of the working people of their savings, easily, freely and "legally" America is absolutely supreme! Here through all kinds of legalized larceny the people at large are deprived of their savings as easily as a child of its candy, and in this the American continent has absolutely no rival nor equal.

MRS. LAWTON. Well, upon my word!...

ROBERT. The total amount of larceny committed in this great country of ours in violation of law is trivial and insignificant compared with what is accomplished annually through glorious larceny as practiced by our big corporations under the full protection of our laws. Hundreds of millions are fleeced annually from the toiling masses, by fake mining companies, instalment lot companies and in various other legalized speculations of the worthless kinds. When you think of the amount of legal machinery required to transfer annually the wealth of the many into the coffers of the few owners of the national resources, you will not wonder why we have so many law books.

MRS. LAWTON [Assisting him with his tape]. You are jesting, sir. Tell me, tell me truly, how can one account for so many law books?...

ROBERT [Bending down on his knees to assure correct measures]. We have too many laws; so many that even lawyers cannot read them and do not know them. [Getting up.] It is hard to keep pace with the laws. Every legislator thinks himself a salon and attempts to pass all the laws he can, you know. Pen and ink is cheap and that is practically all the capital and material lawmakers require.

MRS. LAWTON. At any rate, I am sure these volumes of laws are not marriage laws; in marriage, very simply the two are made one.

ROBERT [Inquiringly]. Which one?

MRS. LAWTON. Now, now really! Is the law divided into so many departments and sections?

ROBERT [Smiling broadly]. Candidly, madam, "The Code of the State of New York is staggering under the weight of its sections. Some judges know more law than they know life and champion some outworn philosophy which they impose on the people." Again we have glorious larceny as practiced by the rich, for whom laws practically do not exist, *you know*.

MRS. LAWTON [Puzzled]. Glorious larceny. [Pause.] The term is new.

ROBERT [Confidingly]. Glorious larceny consists exclusively of robberies committed under the protection of the law by the great business interests operating under the supervision of the greatest corporation lawyers. [Pause.] It is my special forte, you know. Jim the Penman of old used to forge a man's name to a check and draw upon it what he could at the time...that was all!...Nowadays, the corporation lawyer has invented greater and more powerful weapons. He gets real signatures to documents which are forged in the interest of the corporation, his client, and in this way obtains far better results, *you know*.

MRS. LAWTON. How so?

ROBERT [Plaintively]. You see, in this way the victims keep on paying them money year in and year out for the rest of their natural life and never find out that they have been robbed until they are old or dead, *you know*.

MRS. LAWTON. Why should one deal with soulless corporations who are using the law itself as a means and ways for the undoing of the people? Of what value is a legal claim against a corporation, backed up by corporation attorneys, such as you.

ROBERT. None whatever, I admit, but what is one to do when the corporation in question is in absolute control of the desired article, as is generally the case,...you know. For us to relieve the public of their money is as easy as taking candy from a baby.

MRS. LAWTON [Reflecting]. I see you know your loaded dice well...You know how to steal according to law. I will do for you what I would not do for anybody else. I will allow you to cover up the walls of the dining-room and the entire vacant space in the alcove; in fact, you may place your books anywhere, everywhere, in every room of the apartment.

ROBERT [Taking a mental picture of the relative size of the room to that of his books]. No, the space is too small, I am quite sure it

is... It will not hold a single thousand of my volumes—the books are quite bulky, you know.

MRS. LAWTON [Admiringly]. What a fortune one must have to buy so many books, what an intellect to digest them!

ROBERT [Proudly]. I should say so!... I am a specializing attorney, my practice is limited to corporation law only, you know [Pause.]. otherwise my library would be very much larger. [Pause.] Candidly, I have taken a great liking to you, but the place is too small, I am sorry...

MRS. LAWTON [Regretfully]. Well, even if you decide against the room, you could still come to see us! [Excitedly.] I receive the last Wednesday of each month, . . . provided it does not fall on a Friday!

ROBERT [Cordially]. I shall be delighted! It is too bad though that we should have to part on account of such a . . . trifle, *you know*.

MRS. LAWTON [Walking about, to and fro]. Let me think, let me think!

ROBERT [Playfully]. I have an idea!... The landlord should be invited to build an extension, another ten or fifteen feet of space might suffice. [Watching the expression of her face, and noticing her disappointment.] I am so anxious to hit upon a practical working plan, so very anxious, *you know*...

MRS. LAWTON [Walking to and fro]. An extension in the air! [Pause.] This will never do... and the other tenants will object... wait, I have it... we will consult my daughter. My daughter, sir, is a wonderful manager in such things... [Getting excited.] last summer when we started for our vacation, she actually succeeded to pack our thirty-six hats in but four trunks, and you know what hats are this summer! [Calling.] Louise! Louise! [Enter Louise.]

MRS. LAWTON [Introducing]. My daughter, Mr. Delay, the famous lawyer... [Robert and Louise exchange courtesies.] Mr. Delay is quite anxious to come and live with us, my dear, if only... if only... we could find sufficient accommodations for his law books... [Pause.] Couldn't you think of something? How did you manage last summer to pack our hats so compactly?... Advise us, tell us!

LOUISE [Glancing around]. That was quite simple... I removed the boxes and placed the hats one on top of the other. If this gentleman is ready to remove the covers from his books, a lot of valuable space will surely be saved!

ROBERT. Excellent! But you will have to think again. If I could save the beautiful covers at the expense of sacrificing the printed pages, I would consider it. The books are bought for the bindings, you know!

[Noticing their animated conversation, Mrs. Lawton withdraws.]

LOUISE [Assuring herself that they are alone. Placing her arm on his right shoulder]. I tell you, Bob, this will never do...You are simply throwing stones in your own way, forcing both of us to walk over them!

ROBERT [Uneasy]. Has my impersonation of the author failed?

LOUISE [Playfully]. No, your author was a great success. [Smiling broadly.] Never again will she entertain a member of the scribbling fraternity, as a son-in-law; I refer to your other impersonations, your doctor and lawyer.

ROBERT [Disturbed]. What of them? Anything wrong?...

LOUISE [Earnestly]. Everything!...More than ever she is now impressed with the importance of the doctor and the lucrative rewards of the lawyer and she will go for both!...The man I love is twice in competition with himself as somebody else. [Fingering her left hand.] He can't win as he is and he is not what he pretends to be. A trinity of one in three and three in one, and when it is all over, what then?...

ROBERT [Grasping her hand]. My darling, be reasonable, in order to control the territory, I must keep one of my competitors in the field, to the very end...As to the rest, they shall all vanish! [His hands on her shoulders.] I enter willingly into this treaty, guarantee it [Kissing her on the forehead.] and now I have signed it!...

LOUISE [More composed]. Hurry, dearé Maxie and I are right in the midst of our dinner.

[They separate. Enter Mrs. Lawton.]

LOUISE [To her mother, disappointedly]. I have done my best to persuade Mr. Delay to put part of his books in storage, it's the only way...but he is so terribly undecided...I can do no more. [Exits.]

ROBERT [Protestingly]. I hope you don't blame me...If you were advised to put the best part of your beautiful hats in storage, I am sure, you wouldn't like it.

MRS. LAWTON [Pleasantly]. I would rather go without food! If the size of a lawyer's library is the proper index of his clientele you must have a very lucrative practice.

ROBERT [Boastfully]. I can't complain, *you know*. [Pause.] Every case I get stays on my books!...[Pause.] although not always on the same court calendar. [Pause.] Fighting large corporations is like bombarding a fog, *you know*.

MRS. LAWTON [Inquiringly]. Would you mind being more explicit?

ROBERT. Quite simple, you know...No final decision has ever been reached on any of my claims. All the cases which I succeeded in placing on the calendar during the said seven years of my legal practice, stay there! If I gain a point in one court it is generally lost in another, when it gets there.

MRS. LAWTON [Inquiringly]. How is it possible?

ROBERT [Smiling broadly]. If you were in the business, you would ask how could it possibly be otherwise! [Pause.] In modern law, *you know*, like in modern warfare, the skill of the corporation attorney consists in fighting his opponent at a respectful distance and in keeping him there, keeping the poor litigant stampeding in the vestibule of justice, until time has made justice impossible.

MRS. LAWTON [Dubiously]. From the way you speak, one is almost tempted to believe that the execution of the law is one thing and the administration of justice quite another.

ROBERT [Playfully]. No practical lawyer denies it. That which the big corporations dislike they declare illegal, but for every law which may be on the statutes against them, there is a loop-hole, you know. [Pause.] and that is what we big corporation lawyers are for.

MRS. LAWTON [Admiringly]. I shall send down to the cellar anything and everything which is not of immediate use, including our winter furs and gloves. Every inch of closet room in the kitchen or bedrooms is henceforth yours for your learned books. [Emphatically.] You shall be suited!

ROBERT [Shamming]. On my honour as a lawyer, I am glad and very grateful!... [Watching closely.] *You know*, if I may be permitted to arrange some of the things in this room, a whole lot more of valuable space will be saved, I am sure. [Gets hold of the two elaborate vases at both sides of the mantelpiece, knocks one against the other and succeeds in breaking both.] A thousand pardons, so clumsy of me. I am truly sorry! You know...

MRS. LAWTON [Repressing her emotions]. Oh, it's nothing, pray don't mention it... I am glad they are broken, since their removal will aid you in getting more space for your books. They were only an old pair, anyway, from the 15th or 16th century, I don't remember which. [Collecting the broken pieces and placing them on desk near wall R. U. E.]

ROBERT [Same play]. Now, now, if and when this desk is moved towards the centre, it practically gives me room for another bookcase, you know...

MRS. LAWTON [Humoring him.]. A capital idea, capital!...

[Robert gets hold of desk, moving it towards C., but by the time it reaches its destination, the legs are all broken, and all the articles on the desk, letterheads and envelopes, including Robert's portfolio and books, scatter about the room.] [Picture.]

MRS. LAWTON [Heartbroken—picking up from the floor the letterheads, envelopes and other articles scattered, placing them on table]. I am glad the desk is broken and done with, since, as you say, it gives us additional space for another bookcase. [Cleaning with her R. sleeve

Robert's portfolio, then depositing it together with his book and other articles on table L.]

ROBERT [Dusting carefully his law books, then glancing about the room]. Now, if I could find room for but one more bookcase. [Pausing for a moment.] Wait, I have it...*you know*. I will place the table where we intended to place the desk, [Pointing.] right there in the centre. [Gets hold of the table which shares the same fate as the desk, the legs break as soon as the new destination is reached and the articles scatter all over the room.]

MRS. LAWTON [Picking up again his law books and portfolio and holding them in her arms—nerving herself]. Now, now that all the necessary space has at last been secured, we may consider the bargain closed...and have some wine in honor of this momentous occasion. [Depositing his belongings on dining room table.] I am so glad to have a lawyer of your talents as my daughter's constant companion; the moral support is simply overwhelming, and if at any time there is anything you particularly want, a special kind of meat or pie, why just tell me. [Brings forward two bottles. Pointing to the bottles.] I have just two kinds of wine, which will you take?

ROBERT [Greedily]. Both!... [Comes forward and helps himself freely to the wine.] In the presence of such charming company, *you know*, I shall be delighted...delighted! Happy days!... [Drinks again.] I am glad to have found so congenial a home.

MRS. LAWTON. [Coquetishly]. You seem to be a jolly kind of companion for a respectable woman. [Pause.] Oh, marriage is a life-long honeymoon and a sanctuary for pleasure!

ROBERT [Protestingly, beginning to feel his wine]. Heaven redeem me from excessive virtue! I like but never practice it...Are you threatening me with marriage! Oh [Searching.] you stop at nothing...W-wwhere is my portfolio, my books, my hat?...*Me* to marry?...

MRS. LAWTON [Protesting, quieting him down]. Oh, no, certainly, certainly not,—I am only modestly suggesting that you should take a wife.

ROBERT [Carelessly placing his hat on the gas pipe of chandelier, then drinking]. Oh, of course, this is different [Tipsy], well, whose wife do you want me to take? Oh, this wine is spl-en-did! I feel like a depositor in a Robin bank who was paid in full! [Refilling his glass.] Come, let us have another drink.

MRS. LAWTON. You have seen my daughter, sir. [Pause.] Don't you go until you see her again. You shall become friends at once.

ROBERT [Tipsy]. No, no! Certainly, certainly not. [Offering

hand.] Let us shake hands on it... After all, marriage is better than death. Ye gods and little fishes, [Glass in hand.] this wine is inspiring.

MRS. LAWTON [Offers Robert some cakes which he takes and eats greedily one after the other, then Robert takes another drink, spitting out the cakes and wine on the floor, drops his glass and breaks it, to the amazement and disgust of Mrs. Lawton.]

ROBERT [Picking up one of his law books in reverse position and opening it]. Since when have they started to print law books topsy turvy? [Drops book on floor with a bang. Replacing book and upsetting champagne bottle, beating the table cloth excitedly.] I thought I saw snakes... [Beats table cloth from other end, then lifting up table and upsetting everything.]

MRS. LAWTON [Disgusted]. Perhaps, you will have some more drink... You have only had two final bottles... I will turn on the water pump... I think it will do you good... [Pause]... Better still, go and ask some obliging friend to put your head into a cooler—go!...

ROBERT [Picking up his law books and portfolio, dropping one as he obtains the other article, to be humored with audience, walking tipsy manner. To Mrs. Lawton]. I never knew there were so many of you, and the more faces you have, the funnier you look. Excuse me!... [Hand to his mouth.] excuse me!... W-w-where is m-my hat. [Noticing his hat on chandelier, he snatches it, breaking up the end of the gas pipe, kicking it into the library with his foot.] I will see the bedroom some other time [Waving his hand at the door.], some other time, I will co-co-come ag-gug-gug-gain. [Struggling to keep from falling, then exits.] [Slams the door.]

MRS. LAWTON [Bewildered]. My rug, my best rug!...

[Maxie and Louise on tip-toe return from their respective rooms, Maxie looking for his plate.]

MAXIE [Finding his plate and getting seated]. I have lost my appetite.

LOUISE [Resuming her former position]. I hope that no poor man has found it, it would ruin him... [In eager expectation.] Well, mother darling, everything settled, settled? [Coaxingly.] Say he has taken the room, oh, Christmas, I am so glad, mother dear.

MRS. LAWTON [Collecting the pieces of broken glass and eyeing the mass on the rug]. Unsettled, my dear, terribly unsettled! [To herself.] He is undoubtedly a man of quantity and capacity! [Uneasy and returning to table.] If you don't mind I would much rather defer judgment, some other time, some other time. [Aside.] I can't stand it, I fear I shall faint, I feel it coming.

LOUISE [Disappointed]. As you like, mother dear, as you like! [Aside.] He certainly is *some* lawyer!...

MAXIE [Excitedly]. He is a hell of a lawyer...I listened at my door when this Mr. "*You-now*" talked about his books...Gee whiz! I didn't think there were so many law books in the world.

MRS. LAWTON [Eating]. I see it all now...Lawyers, like druggists, need much display and show, the only difference is that the former never deal in scruples...To be a good lawyer requires almost everything but a conscience...[Eyeing the mass on floor.] Oh, you Mr. "*You-now*"...

MAXIE. Yes, mother dear, from the way he talked one could easily surmise that those that go to the law for damages are pretty sure to get them.

MRS. LAWTON [Eating]. Poachers live by snaring of hares, lawyers by splitting them.

LOUISE. Look out, Maxie, you are getting your sleeve into the gravy.

MAXIE [Carefully examining his sleeve ends]. Laws like sausages cease to inspire respect in proportion as we know how they are made...Lawyers as a rule are all settlement workers...

MRS. LAWTON. I am sick of his law! [Her hand to her nose.]

One look at the man will convince you that he studies law from necessity. Does anyone smell gas? [Bus.] Oh, my goodness!

MAXIE [Excitedly]. I fear an explosion...

[All of them looking for the cause, examining the chandelier, Mrs. Lawton discovering the broken gas jet, to Maxie.] Bring me some cotton, quick!...

MAXIE [Returning with piece of cotton, Mrs. Lawton stuffing up the broken pipe]. I was surprised, like Goliath when David struck him with a stone, such a thing never entered our heads before.

[The excitement subsides, all return to their former positions at table.] [The street bell rings.]

MRS. LAWTON. Our bell is popular this morning!

BELINDA [Showing herself at the door]. Dat dere door bell ringin' all day long. It mixes me up so much, I don't know where I is...

MRS. LAWTON [Instructively]. If it somebody else to look at the room, don't admit them! [Pause.] I have had quite enough of them for one day. [Exit Belinda into hall L.]

LOUISE [Playfully]. There is no use denying that you have lost two boarders in one day.

MAXIE. Mother is careless—throwing away chances like this! [Teasingly.] Take another chance, mother, take another chance.

MRS. LAWTON [Angrily]. Maxie, please pay a little attention to me!

MAXIE [Playfully]. I am paying as little attention as possible, mother dear!

BELINDA [From the hall.] No, sar, no, sar. I ain't made no mistake, sar!... You wait, wait! I ain't allowed to permit nobody!—I'll see misses!...

ROBERT [At the library door, hat on]. As you please, as you please. [Handing a coin to Belinda, who examines and pockets it.]

BELINDA [Eyeing him]. I' clar sir, if I didn't forget to ax you to take off yo' hat, I'm actually gettin' dat absent minded I hain't got common perliteness no mo...

[Robert removing his hat and disappearing into the hall.]

BELINDA [At dining-room door, handing card to Mrs. Lawton]. Dere am a gentleman to see you! [To herself.] Crickey and jeeroosalem, ain't it jolly! Anoder, anoder!

MRS. LAWTON [Reading]. Mr. "Windman-Waterit", promoter.

LOUISE [Cunningly]. It never rains but it pours! [Smiling.] What a funny name!

MAXIE. Just fancy, a promoter!... A promoter, a promoter, you know is a man who furnishes the ocean, if you produce the ships. [Pause.] The other day one of them offered me some waterfront lots for sale by the quart. [Pause.] I could measure them, he said, when the tide was low.

MRS. LAWTON [To Maxie]. Don't talk, don't talk, Maxie. You are better at thinking. [To Belinda, sternly.] I instructed you to admit no one, why are my orders disobeyed?

BELINDA. He comes from the landlord mam an' insists dat he must see you, or he would make us move at once, he says...

LOUISE [Nervously]. From the landlord? Great Scotland, it is a nice kettle of fish we are in!... A lawsuit!...

MRS. LAWTON [Disappointedly]. A lawsuit! Something nobody likes to lose, nor wishes to have. Show him in, show him in!... [Improving her appearance, whispering to Louise, who exits door left Belinda door right.] [Maxie lingers behind.]

MRS. LAWTON. Unfold your easel, Maxie, and pretend to be at work... We will show this promoter that we are indifferent to his threats.

MAXIE. [Moves to library and opens a box from which he takes out a folded easel and a semi-finished painting which he instantly places in position]. Trust me, mother dear, when it comes to showing off. [Gets his brushes and palettes in shape and begins to paint rapidly.]

MRS. LAWTON [Picking up hand glass from desk and looking into it]. Oh, my hair!... [Exits door R.]

BELINDA [From hall]. Wolk right in, sir, into de drawing room, de drawing room!

[Enter Robert door left, dressed as a promoter and prosperous real estate broker about town. A contrast to his former make up. His clothes are more correct than his grammar, speaks with an accent.]

MAXIE [Walking over to the left of library and meeting Robert—digging him in the ribs—then aloud]. Have a chair, sir, have a chair!

ROBERT. Ich danke, Ich danke. [Fidgetting with hat.] I am rather restless to-day. Yah! [Moves away from Maxie, when the latter is about to repeat the digging.]

MAXIE [Generously]. Well then, have two chairs, have two chairs, sir;!

ROBERT [Still standing]. You are kind—Yah!

MAXIE [Playfully]. How do you spell your name?

ROBERT. De ordinary, quite de ordinary way.

ROBERT [Playfully]. Do you know anything about real estate?

MAXIE, Oh yes, lots! [Enter Mrs. Lawton.]

MRS. LAWTON [Bowing]. I see you are admiring my son's painting Ah, he is a wonderful artist He once painted a cork so much like marble that when by mistake I threw it into the water it sank like stone!

ROBERT [Sympathetically]. Wunderbahr! Wunderbahr. What an irreparable loss to de connoisseur.

MAXIE [Encouraged]. I never studied dentistry, never as a rule, look down in the mouth, you know, but [Displaying his pencils] with this I can draw every tooth in your head, not only without pain, but without the consciousness of the operation, provided you only open your mouth and keep your eyes shut

ROBERT [To Mrs. Lawton, surprised]. Virlich? Gott in himmel, Vee vunderbahr Vee interesant! I can readily see dat he is a born artist. [Examining closely his canvass and noticing that it is but a combination of different shades of blue.] [To Maxie.] What is de subject of your painting? If I may ask? Nu—yah!

MAXIE. Why, why it is the Spanish fleet an hour after they met Dewey... [Dropping painting on floor, picking it up excitedly and cleaning the back side of canvass.]

ROBERT. Donnerwetter! Och himmel! Vi interesant! De description is wonderfully accurate. No one would, no one could dare say dat dere is a trace of any warship above de water... You should put your name at the bottm and in large letters—God, when a man can paint like dis, he is not afraid of noding!...

MAXIE [Excitedly]. I should say not! [To his mother.] Keep at a distance, you will spoil my ships. [To Robert again.] My subject is absolutely free from all unnecessary objects, a mistake so frequently noticed nowadays in the paintings of my competitors in the Academy of Design and the British Royal Academy.

ROBERT [Patting him on the shoulder]. Och, dey don't understood. Dey don't count! Nein! My young friend, no one could ever accuse you of introducing atmosphere into your subjects. [Pause.] When you have finished its companion picture—dat of Dewey's fleet an hour after de battle,—I know de very party who will buy it! Gantz geviss!

MAXIE. This is good news! [Backing out before Robert as he exits.]

MRS. LAWTON. It was very nice of you to encourage my son to greater and better effort. [Sweetly.] But you have not called to merely discuss paintings...

ROBERT. Yah, I am afraid not, my task is not as pleasant...de fact is my call is in de nature of a complaint, es tut mir leid!

MRS. LAWTON [Uneasy]. A complaint?

ROBERT [To Mrs. Lawton]. Yah, de tenant underneath complains about blue dripping down from your floor into his apartment and spoiling some valuable linen and cloding...

MRS. LAWTON [Losing her temper]. You don't think that I have done it. That I would do such a thing?

ROBERT [Confused]. Yah, nein, nein, yah! You see I sold dis house to de present owner and knew dat de walls and ceiling were patched wid rubbish [Smiling broadly], but dat dis dirt and rubbish should turn into blue is new to me!

MRS. LAWTON [Motioning him to a chair, Robert taking it]. You speak about dirt and rubbish. [Pointedly.] I knew nothing about it when I signed my lease.

ROBERT [Smiling broadly]. Es ferschteit zich! Of course not, the lease was signed for de landlord's benefit, not yours!...When I bought it, you know, it was an old stable wid a leaking roof, he...he...

MRS. LAWTON [Surprised]. An old stable!

ROBERT [Playfully]. Yah, Yah, gantz nateerlich!...I am an old hand at dis dings, I had it polished from widout and patched wid rubbish from widin. [Smiling broadly.] When de false front was put on at de top, de building looked up like a woman in her new Easter hat!

MRS. LAWTON [Pointedly]. But this is hardly honest!

ROBERT [Lighting a cigar]. Gott in Himmel—honest! If you want honesty, apply it to someding else dan real estate speculations.

MRS. LAWTON [Confidingly]. Although you represent the owner, I trust you. The blue dripping to the next floor can be explained. There was an accident in our kitchen yesterday, an accident for which no member of my immediate household is responsible, you understand.

ROBERT [Removing ashes from his cigar]. Ich glaube, yes, yes... the man who did it was a grosser Lump.

MRS. LAWTON [Convincingly]. I told you the truth... But it is new and disappointing to learn that in my home the walls and ceilings are far from solid! This is terrible! Give me some proofs and you will see what I will do...

ROBERT [Puffing at his cigar, then blowing a cloud of smoke in Mrs. Lawton's face, compelling her to cough and close her eyes]. Gevis, gevis!... you want proofs and... you shall have dem... [He smokes again, again blowing the smoke in her face as above. Mrs. Lawton closing her eyes. At this he gets three plates from the table, hitting the chandelier with one, the plate rail with the other and the ceiling with a third, following it up with a blank shot from a revolver, which he quickly pockets.] Dear me, it is worse dan I thought!... [The crockery from the plate rail falls to the ground and on the sideboard, breaking some and upsetting the rest... The chandelier trembles in no uncertain way and like a cloud of smoke the dirt continues to come down from the hall in the ceiling. Thunder and lightning follow.]

MRS. LAWTON [Frightened and unnerved, her eyes closed]. My head goes round and around. Everything is confused. The walls are falling. Belinda! Belinda!... [Faints.]

[Enter Belinda, all in a flutter.]

BELINDA. Great Caesar's ghost... Oh, Mrs. mme, mam!... [Excitedly.] Who fired dat gun? [Examining herself.] If I is killed, I wants to know it...

ROBERT. At de slightest test dis ceiling has broken down!... [Confused at the dirt falling from ceiling.] Dear me, still falling!...

BELINDA [Noticing that Mrs. Lawton has fainted, calling through the open door.] Oh, Miss Louise, Miss Louise! I is all in a flurry! Get your moder's smellin' salt and hurry, de smellin' salt!... [Opening the drawers of sideboard and emptying their contents on the floor.] I is lookin' for for her *eau de colina*, de eau de colina!... [Placing some lace in her pockets and sleeves.]

LOUISE [Sternly to Belinda, bringing the smelling salts with her]. Leave the drawers alone! [Comes up to her mother, applying the smelling salt and fanning her.] Open the windows, open, wide!... What she wants is more air!... She wants all the air she can get!... [To Robert.] Now we are all in for it good and hard.

[Maxie enters, door right. In clothes worn during act one.]

MAXIE [To Robert, angrily]. My actor friend, this is carrying it too far!... A joke is a joke, but [Pointing to her condition.] look at this! [Clenching his fists.] Our household has been on the blink ever since you entered it!...

ROBERT [Uneasy.] She is sensitively organized, temperamental, and all dat. . . excitement is too much for her. [Nervously, his hand to his collar.] Gott, how infernally hot it is, and how it makes me perspire.

LOUISE [Self-possessed, continuing to fan her mother]. Mother will recover soon enough. . . [To Robert, emphatically and uneasy.] But *you*, what are *you* going to do *when* she recovers?

MAXIE [Eyeing the mass on the floor]. Hell is a cool place—cool and shady compared to what this place is going to be a few minutes hence. Oh, wouldn't there be fireworks when mother recovers.

ROBERT [Changing his accent to his normal voice, and removing his make-up, playfully]. What am I going to do? Why. . . I have worked mighty hard to win her as my patient. . . now, now I am going to take care of her! . . .

MAXIE [Sardonically]. Make way for the Doctor! . . .

ROBERT [Placing her head on his shoulder and getting hold of her, Robert lifts her from the chair, Louise assisting taking hold of her legs, Maxie and Belinda wheel in a couch from the alcove to the middle of the library, Robert placing Mrs. Lawton on couch in a reclining position, facing audience.]

LOUISE [More composed]. Prescribe something for her, Robert dear, as soon as she recovers; rose water, or bread pills, anything, anything!

MAXIE [Instructively]. Take my advice and make it strong! Quinine and water! She has no confidence in a medicine unless it is both strong and bitter. [Pause.] She told me so yesterday.

LOUISE. Maxie is quite right, quite right for once.

ROBERT [While they are talking, Robert unbuttons Mrs. Lawton's shirtwaist at the top, tearing up in excitement the collar and upper part of the shirtwaist, and with the skill of an osteopath, manipulates the nerve centers, applying his pointed fingers to her bare shoulders, cheeks and forehead.

[In dumb show he motions Belinda to draw the portieres between the dining-room and library, to which she quickly responds and withdraws, D. R. The drawn portieres hide completely the mass in the drawing-room from Mrs. Lawton's view as she opens her eyes.]

[Maxie moves upstage in the opposite direction, withdrawing at door L.]

ROBERT [Whispers into Louise's ear, and as Mrs. Lawton opens her eyes, Robert moves his jaw rapidly without making a sound, Louise following his example.]

MRS. LAWTON [Trying hard to catch a sound]. I am stone deaf . . . deaf . . . that is frightful. . . as deaf as a post. . . [Listening more

closely.] What did you say? [Emphatically.] I am sure you said something...Which of us is going mad, you two, or I?

ROBERT [Watching Mr. Lawton, then dramatically, hands to both sides of his head, as if terrified, in an undertone, as if whispering]. Good God, this is awful!...I have certainly cut off the wrong leg!!!...

MRS. LAWTON [Draws her legs under her, lays flat on her back, feeling her hips in turn, hysterically]. I am scared to death, unnerved completely!...Oh, my eyes, my cheeks...Am I out of my wits...Will I ever survive it...Am I going to die?...

ROBERT [Reassuring]. You are doing well, very well indeed! [To Louise.] Feed her on milk, milk only...mixed with a little quinine for the first few days!...In a month she will forget that she was sick.

LOUISE [Respectfully]. Your orders shall be obeyed. [Gratefully.] Oh, Doctor, how can I sufficiently thank you!...

MRS. LAWTON [To Louise, regaining consciousness, holding her skirts down]. Hand me the hand glass...[Louise hands her the hand glass from the mantel nearby. Mrs. Lawton examining herself in mirror, after a pause.] Only the shadow of my former self, only a shadow!...[Hysterically.] Oh, Doctor, Doctor, I am not a bit nervous, but will I survive it?...[Drops hand glass with a shriek of horror.] Will I live?...

LOUISE [To Robert, aside]. Keep it up and she will collapse in earnest!...[To her mother.] You have heard from the Doctor's own lips that you are doing well. [Petting her.] This should encourage and satisfy you. [Kissing her. Then to Robert, aside.] Get her out of this, it is getting dangerous.

ROBERT [Aloud]. I assure you, Miss, it was nothing more than a temporary hallucination when your mother probably thought she saw things! Somehow, somewhere.

MRS. LAWTON [Repeating]. —probably thought she saw things! Why...surely...surely...

ROBERT [Warningly]. You are all nerves, my friend, do be careful. [Stroking the back of her hair].

LOUISE. Don't excite yourself, mother, don't excite yourself. All your visions are chestnuts...

ROBERT [Putting a little spoon in Mrs. Lawton's mouth, making her say Ah, Ah, Ah, then to Louise]. This people believe more in their nightmares than you and I in the things we actually see. Don't try to dispute with her...It is part of her sickness, you know...

LOUISE [Coaxingly]. You will be careful, mother dear.

MAXIE [In the hall to Belinda]. Keep out of the room.

MRS. LAWTON [Dreamily]. I hear voices!... [Feeling her legs in turn.] I thought I lost my legs... [Again examining her hips.] It must have been a horrible nightmare. [Picking up her hand glass again.] Can it be possible that I am only run down? Only run down? [To Robert.] And do you really think that a month in bed will cure me? Oh, Doctor, you are giving me a new lease on life.

ROBERT
You are getting on splendidly. Your pulse is regular. [To Louise.]... A regular pulse...but there are a few symptoms which I must still watch... [Taking out his watch from R. vestcoat pocket and calling her attention to it, as he holds it some distance from her ear.] Do you hear the ticking of this watch? [Mrs. Lawton indicates with a nod of the head that she does, and he accordingly removes the watch to some further distance.] Now, now!... [Trying the other ear and convincing her that her hearing is not affected.] Splendid, splendid! I am overjoyed, it couldn't be better. I will cure you, I know I will! [Motioning her to lie down again, to which she complies with child-like obedience, as he strokes the back of her hair.]

MRS. LAWTON [Closing her eyes]. The Doctor, the dear, kind doctor!...

[Noticing their opportunity, Robert and Louise kiss and embrace. Maxie looks in through the slightly drawn portieres, Belinda through door left, as the curtain falls.]

ACT III.

[Evening of the following day. Same scene as in the two previous acts. The ceiling in the dining-room has been fixed and the silver on the sideboard replaced, but the crockery on the plate rail is missing.]

[Discovered, Mrs. Lawton reclining on couch in the library facing audience. Robert, dressed as the doctor, standing on the right facing her. Both are in elegant evening clothes. Mrs. Lawton convalescing.]

[As the curtain rises, Robert is discovered lifting coffee cup and drinking.]

MRS. LAWTON [Sipping some milk]. As I taste your medicine, dear, kind doctor, [Eyeing him admiringly.] every answering fibre in my body tells me that this is what was wanted, the real, real stuff!...

ROBERT [Eyeing the glass of milk, aside]. Oh, my milk bottle, well have you done your work! [Aloud.] I am glad you have forgotten all about the broken crockery and the rest of it.

MRS. LAWTON [Agitated, making an effort and finally succeeding in sitting up]. I have forgotten, have I! That plate breaker will do well never to enter my house again!...If he does...I will not send him to hell...Oh no...[Getting hold of her pillow with the left hand and liqueur bottle with the other, threateningly, shaking the bottle in front of the pillow, as if the pillow were the real living enemy.] I will raise it!

ROBERT [Amazingly calm, relieving her of the bottle and pillow in turn and replacing to former positions]. Don't excite yourself, my friend. If he should turn up, we will both deal with him as he deserves. [Placing both of his hands to her forehead until she is reduced to a reclining position, same as at opening of act; picks up his coffee cup, taking a few paces about the room.]

MRS. LAWTON [Regaining her composure]. Dear Doctor! Your masterful hand on my forehead is so soothing and consoling. [Pause.] May I trouble you again. [Robert, replacing his cup on little stand, rubbing her forehead.] Dear, kind Doctor, I don't know what I would have done without you, you have saved my boy and [Coquettishly.] you have done a lot for me...[Extending her right hand.] How is my pulse to-day?...

ROBERT [Taking out his watch, which he holds in his left hand, holding her wrist with his right]. Seventy-six and one-eighth. [Pause.] Almost normal!

MRS. LAWTON [Gratified]. Such an improvement on yesterday's seventy-six and three-quarters!...For all this I am truly grateful.

ROBERT [Picking up his coffee cup and drinking]. Nothing but complete obedience on the part of the patient could have brought about such wonderful results.

MRS. LAWTON [Eyeing him closely]. My dear, dear Doctor, there is something about you personally which makes me feel that we have met before!...Don't I remember you?...

ROBERT [Composed]. No, no, but you will!...Oh, it was worth a whole lifetime to secure your patronage!...[Making her comfortable.]

MRS. LAWTON. Dear, kind Doctor, how will I ever repay you for your kindness.

ROBERT [Sipping his coffee]. Pray don't mention it, the privilege is all mine, all mine, I assure you.

MRS. LAWTON [Sipping some milk and replacing glass on tray]. Believe me, although a woman, I am not of the fainting kind! Oh, no! But [Her eyes fixed on the chandelier in the dining-room, and then wandering in the direction of the sideboard.] when I saw my entire collection of imported china on the plate rail fall to the ground and break into a thousand pieces, my brain reeled and...I fainted! Oh, when I think of this plate breaker! [Grabs the pillow again and stretches her hand for the bottle.]

ROBERT [Getting hold of the bottle, then makes a few paces towards opening leading into dining-room, fixing his gaze on the bare plate rail]. Fate can be very cruel at times!...but [Sympathetically.] since I have gained through it such an interesting patient, you will allow me, I trust, to send you a duplicate set and make good...

MRS. LAWTON [Earnestly]. I wouldn't hear of it! I am under the greatest obligation to you as it is.

ROBERT [Protestingly, replacing his cup on tray]. I have done nothing! [Pause.] Nothing more than any other person placed in my position would do!

MRS. LAWTON [Gratefully]. Ah, dear, kind Doctor...you have done me a world of good! [Playfully.] Now, now...do you really think that tight lacing is bad for consumption?

ROBERT [Playfully]. No, no, not at all. [Pause.] It is what it lives on!

MRS. LAWTON [Takes up coffee pot and is about to pour out some more coffee for him].

ROBERT [Protestingly]. Thank you, no more for me! A doctor should not indulge too much in a beverage which he forbids to most of his patients.

MRS. LAWTON [Replacing coffee pot to former position]. Come now the truth, my friend, are very tight corsets really injurious to the brain?

ROBERT [Earnestly]. My dear, dear friend, not in the least, not in the least, for one who has brains never wears them. The more a woman's waist is like an hourglass, the sooner will the sands of life run out.

MRS. LAWTON [Playfully]. Ah, you doctors are very strict!

ROBERT [Sincerely]. True, this is our weakness and at the same time the source of our strength. Caution is the Parent of safety and moderation is the silken string running through the pearl chain of all virtues. Dyspepsia is the reward of a guilty stomach. You cannot draw a bill on the bank of health without meeting it, doctor or no doctor!...The best physicians are Doctor Diet, Doctor Quiet and Doctor Merryman.

MRS. LAWTON. You doctors stop at nothing to amuse us, even when it is at your own expense, *who are you*, Doctor Foolthem or Doctor Commonsense?...

ROBERT [Playfully]. Both!...True, we often care more about pleasing our patients than telling them the truth. What would become of my practice if I told all my patients that their symptoms are no token of diseases? [Pause.] But it is true that the treatment sometimes causes the disease.

MRS. LAWTON [Confidentially]. I have often thought that the necessity for taking pills, even little ones, at regular intervals, acts as a perpetual reminder of illness which retards recovery.

ROBERT [Quickly]. You can't accuse me of giving you any! Disease generally comes to those who have been preparing for it, and most aches and pains are remedial moves on the part of nature to keep us well! What one really needs is to acquire the health habit.

MRS. LAWTON [Repeating]. The health habit?

ROBERT [Earnestly]. Exactly! [Pacing about the room.] Boiled down to real facts, no illness can be cured until the patient changes his mind and gets a new method of thinking, when we forget ourselves in useful effort we are well.

MRS. LAWTON [Protestingly]. Am I to believe that progressive whist, or bridge...could do away permanently with doctors and anatomists, anatomists, who in muscle, nerve and bone find all the mysteries of life?

ROBERT [Consulting his watch]. I am not the man to knock my own profession, but it is, nevertheless, true that nine-tenths of the people that go to a physician have nothing the matter with them, nothing that can be cured by drugs or that could not better be cured without drugs. The best physician is fresh air, the best pill is pure

fare. No two bodies are alike. What is food for one is poison for another, and therefore the fallacy of specific drugs for specific diseases is self evident. [Again consulting his watch and holding it in his hand.]

MRS. LAWTON [Pointedly]. Are you in a hurry to return home to your wife?

ROBERT [Replacing watch, meaningly]. I am still single, a faithful member of the bachelor's club.

MRS. LAWTON [Playfully]. Home is the best club in the world, that is, when one gets a home of his own... You are single!... Does it mean that you admire too many women too well, or possibly too many too little?

ROBERT [Cunningly]. Quite simple. I admire the sex collectively.

MRS. LAWTON. It is original and has its advantages... It gives everybody a little hope!... [Pause.] Ah, it did not take me long to recognize your good qualities. As soon as I saw you I instantly said, here is a man, that is a man!...

ROBERT [Gallantly]. You are very kind... I assure you the feeling of admiration is mutual.

MRS. LAWTON [Confidingly]. I have taken to you from the start, but... young girls are different. My daughter, sir... of course, I will put in a good word for you, but... it is to ourselves that we must look to in such matters.

ROBERT [Cunningly]. My specialty, you know, is medical, not feminine research... but [Playfully.] do you think I stand a chance?

MRS. LAWTON [Encouragingly]. I should say an excellent one. You are a fine catch for almost any girl... I would like you to get into the race and win.

[Maxie, unseen by Mrs. Lawton, enters the room, hiding behind the couch and nudging Robert from time to time, then exits as he enters.]

ROBERT [Meaningly, pressing her hand]. If you will excuse me, I will go to Maxie, my more serious patient.

[The street bell rings.]

MRS. LAWTON. By all means, Doctor. [Pause.] I was just going to remind you... [Exit Robert.]

[Enter Louise, neatly dressed, carrying a bulky bundle, a mischievous twinkle in her eye.] I have some good news, mother. [Emphatically.] Some very good news...

[Placing bundle on floor near her, then smelling flowers on her corsage.]

MRS. LAWTON [Hopefully, her hand on Louise's waist line]. So have I! I have some dandy news.

LOUISE [Teasingly]. What is yours?

MRS. LAWTON [Eyeing the bundle suspiciously, then putting finishing touches to Louise's dress.] The Doctor is single. He is not married, he is not married...not married.

LOUIS [Mischievously picking up bundle]. My news is better, much better. [Pause.] The playwright has returned! [Unwrapping bundle and displaying Mss. seen in ACT I.]

MRS. LAWTON [Disturbed, throwing the cushions on the floor, and lifting her feet in turn]. Jesus, Maria and Joseph!...The devil he has! Will I ever again succeed to live in peace in my own home?

LOUISE [Gaily]. Mother, darling...He is no longer gloomy...several pages of his soaked through Mss. have been saved...Accordingly, and in equal proportion he says there is hope for the American drama!

MRS. LAWTON [Imploringly, picking up Mss. and handing them to Louise]. Get rid of him, Louise, get rid of him; threaten him with the police; salute him with cold water, and if it doesn't work, get the dog. He showed a great deal of respect for the dog during his other call.

LOUISE [Disappointed—replacing Mss. to former position]. Why, mother darling, you forget, he is a playwright, a dramatist. [Wrapping up the Mss.]

MRS. LAWTON. What of it? When I want real good drama, I go to a moving picture show, and when I want real exciting play, I take a trip to Monte Carlo...I can do without him...I assure you...his profession does not interest me in the least...You wouldn't catch me reading their rubbish, I can tell you! How one million of our good people can keep on wasting their time on scribbling such stuff as we see produced, is a mystery to me.

LOUISE [Disappointed]. Oh, mother dear, mother darling, surely, surely!

MRS. LAWTON [Excitedly]. This man has got on my nerves, I tell you...If I were not an invalid confined to my bed by the doctor's orders, I would exercise my fingernails, set my ten commandments in his face and make his two eyes as black as he made my beautiful rugs!...[Grabs the pillow again and punches it with her hand instead of taking the bottle.] I would make him look so nice that he would be refused at the Morgue.

LOUISE. One thing is clear, mother, you are not in a receptive mood to-night. [Replacing the pillow and making her comfortable.]

[Enter Belinda. Old clothes and linen of the masculine wardrobe on her shoulders, her hair is in curl papers. She has evidently prepared to retire for the night.]

BELINDA [Pointing to the loose clothing]. The playwright's wardrobe have arrived, a whole lot of it. Where is I to put dem?

LOUISE [Handing Belinda the bundle of Mss. belonging to Robert, after counting and re-counting them carefully from both ends several times]. Mother's compliments to the playwright. Tell him that she is indisposed and that the room is already taken. [To her mother.] Don't excite yourself, my dear, it wastes your strength.

BELINDA [Taking bundle]. When I dink of dis man upsettin' my washin'...I feel blue all over!

MRS. LAWTON [Excitedly]. I hate him! I hate him! He is...

LOUISE [To her mother]. Such an excess of hospitality is superfluous. Belinda, tell him that mother is indisposed and make an apology!

BELINDA [Excitedly, replacing bundle on floor and rearranging her apron]. Good Lord, Miss, how is I to make it?...I got no eggs, no butter to make it wid. [Pause.] When I make sometin' I likes to use the regular stuff, notin' pickled or canned...

MRS. LAWTON [Unnerved]. Shup up! You talk like wood, Belinda. [Emphatically.] I am through with hm, you understand, and I am true telling!...

BELINDA [Disappointedly]. Dem is harsh words!...[Picking up bundle again.] Yeas, m-m! Yeas, m-m. [Eyeing Mrs. Lawton, aside.] Such hignorance of cookin'! I's actually shamed of her.

MRS. LAWTON [To Belinda]. For the love of Hoboken and Jersey City, send him away! Yes...tell him to clear out!...Make him see that he is not wanted...

BELINDA [Clenching her fists as she exits]. Oh, wouldn't I give him Jessy.

MRS. LAWTON [Collecting her thoughts]. We were talking of the doctor, dear. He is a man of brains, as well as position. [Excitedly.] Make him propose; watch your chances, watch your chances get married, my dear. Lay aside sentiment and stick to business, for that is all there is to marriage, whether you call it moni-matters or matri-money...I wish I could find a way of leaving you two alone for a while [Despairing] but here am I, an invalid, chained to the couch, an invalid, an invalid!

BELINDA [From hall to Robert]. We has no rooms for playwrights, no accommodation for hellevators of de dramar, brush right out of 'ere, brush right out...You's in de wrong car, I tell yer...yea, de wrong car!...Git a transfer, git a transfer, fade away, fade away.

LOUISE [Cautiously to Mrs. Lawton]. The doctor seems a decent sort, but he is not the only one. [Pause.] Why should you be against my Robert, the actor. Robert is a model young man, he does not smoke, drink, chew, gamble, nor go to church.

MRS. LAWTON [Dubiously]. He doesn't drink?

LOUISE. Not a drop, mother, not a drop, not even gravy!

MRS. LAWTON [Thoughtfully]. I though that as an actor he always plays drunken parts, and is constantly rehearsing them. Be it as it may, Louise, the doctor is simply charming and nothing of consequence has happened to make me change my view about your actor.

LOUISE [Aside]. Robert's doctoring is upsetting everything!... [To her mother.] Ah, mother darling, you are entitled to your opinion but I beg to differ, after all, your marriageables don't show up nearly as favorably with my actor! [Pause.] You said some unpleasant things bout him, but I have made my own inquiries [Pause] and they are reliable!... [Reading.] "After making inquiries about your charmer I find that Robert Emerson is considered in the profession not merely a star among actors, but a great actor among stars! [Pausing in her reading, whatching the expression of her mother's face.] Sampson of old only moved the house, Robert Emerson carries it."

BELINDA [From the hall, making grimaces]. Oh yeas, m-m, I tol' him [with a twinkle in her eye to Louise.] an' he have gone! You will neber hear of dis playwrighter no more.

MRS. LAWTON [Gives a sigh of relief, then to Louise]. You say Robert is a great actor, well honors are cheap, but what does he earn?

LOUISE [Continuing reading]. "Robert Emerson gets \$500. a week all the year round, travels in Pullman cars and stops at the best hotels."

MRS. LAWTON [Brightening up]. Travels in Pullmans, does he?
[Street bell rings again.]

LOUISE [Continues]. "He has the skill of Sir Charles, the intellect of Robertson and the wit of Alexander." Come, mother, say yes, like a man, I mean, a woman.

[Enter Belinda, dragging a large box filled with books—all excitement, placing box on floor.]

BELINDA. Oh, yeas m-m, m-m! De lawyer's library have arrived Two express vans loaded to de tops an' dere am more comin'. Cricky an' Jerusalem, ain't it jolly!

MRS. LAWTON [Disturbed—pointing]. Mother of Peter and Paul, another double barrel shoke!... [Determined.] My compliments to the lawyer. . . and the address of the Harlem cold storage for the expressman [Writing on a card and handing it to Belinda. I will not harbour in my house so many valuable books on this hocus pocus science. [Excitedly.] Take that box away!

BELINDA [Tucking up the sleeves of her shirtwaist and getting hold of the box]. I'll tell him, mam, I'll tell him! [Exit Belinda.]

LOUISE [Artfully]. You are right, mother!... If we must have lawyers, let us have lawyers with a sense of justice, men who would uphold justice even when it is against the law, men pleading for the

enforcement of justice in defiance of laws...men who would work for truth...with the revolving of its giant wheel, insisting upon destroying what exists in the name of what ought to exist, men concerned with the living spirit of justice.

MRS. LAWTON [To Louise]. That is it exactly. My dear child, [Affectionately.] I have learned a great deal during the past few days and admit that all other professions which I idealized do not make nearly as good a showing as your actor, the administrator of good cheer.

LOUISE [Earnestly]. I assure you, mother, that to-day no apology for the stage is needed. It has but to be named to be honored.

MRS. LAWTON. True, but...[Playfully.] the Doctor...the Doctor...he is such a charming fellow, personally. I am a different woman since I have met him...The Doctor must be dealt with first...

LOUISE [Discouraged]. But, mother dear, the Doctor has not asked me.

MRS. LAWTON [Pleadingly]. Give him time...Your father courted me six full weeks before we were engaged.

[The telephone bell rings.]

LOUISE [Picks up receiver, then turns is over to Mrs. Lawton]. It is the spiritual heir of the cotton whigs.

MRS. LAWTON [Taking receiver, listening for a moment, then placing her hand on mouthpiece of telephone]. Yes, it's the lawyer on the phone!...[Listening and repeating.] What? All I have lost is my temper...who will pay me for my beautiful rugs...they are completely ruined...No, I am not trying to make a fool of you. It's one of your natural qualifications...I have insulted your manhood...You will sue me for damages!...good!...I say, what will it cost me if I call you impudent? Yes...[Spelling.] I-m-p-u-d-e-n-t...Five hundred dollars! As much as that!...Well, then, kindly observe that I have not called you by that name yet, but if you lower your price!...Yes, I am tempted to meet your terms!...[Hangs up receiver.] I have seen things like him in cheese!...

LOUISE [Kissing her mother affectionately]. Trust my dear, kind mother, for a timely answer, inoffensive, yet telling!

MRS. LAWTON [Grabbing the bottle and pillow, punching pillow with bottle, as above]. Oh, if I could only throw these things at him through the telephone!

LOUISE [Pacifies her mother, replacing the articles].

[Enter Belinda.]

BELINDA [At the door]. De promoter, M-m, De Mr...Mr. Windman-Waterit have returned.

MRS. LAWTON. Oh, my God! This caps the climax.

BELINDA. He have papers for you to sign! A whole lot of papers he say!...[Handing his card to Mrs. Lawton.]

MRS. LAWTON. Great mackerel! [Pause.] The old lease is enough for me!...[Tearing up the card in a rage and scattering the pieces on the floor. To Belinda.] Telephone...telephone to the Board of Health to remove him and his dirt.

LOUISE [Teasingly]. I understand he is a man of means, [Whispering.] of means!

MRS. LAWTON. Yes, yes, I know, the meanest man in New York!...[An expression of terror and fear co-mingle in her face—is about to grab the pillow but thinks better of it.] I am positively afraid of that man! [Harkening, then looking up to the ceiling to reassure herself that there is no more falling crockery.] Get rid of him, Belinda, get rid of him! [Under her breath.] and...tell Maxie to telephone to police headquarters...if necessary...Heaven help the woman that allows such a man to get a mortgage on her heart!...

LOUISE [Reassuringly]. Never fear, mother dear, he will not forclose on me! [To Belinda.] Just tell him that for my sake, mother gives him his life...Tell him to go to...

BELINDA [Heroically]. I will see de plate-breaker out. Yeas, m-m, yeas, m-m [Displaying her strong arms.] I'll see him out. I'll cut dis shoulder of mutton as if it were cream cheese. [As she exits.] Oh, wouldn't I have him on the half shell.

[The slamming of street-door is heard. Mrs. Lawton gives a sigh of relief.]

MRS. LAWTON. We were speaking of the Doctor, dear.

LOUISE [Playfully]. I have nothing against him, but, mother darling, I am not the least bit excited over the advantages of his profession. The Doctor himself looks up to Robert as his superior! "An ounce of mirth," he says, "is worth a pound of sorrow and that good cheer and merriment succeed where drugs fail."

MRS. LAWTON [Amazed]. The Doctor says that? [Pause.] And does *he* know Robert.

LOUISE [Emphatically at the door within hearing of Robert]. They are the closest of friends, in fact, they are inseparable!...Robert's is the inspired face of art. He makes music of mysteries and wrings poetry from prose. Oh, mother, mother dear, you should see Robert acting, dazzled by the glitter and the glamour which each night surrounds him, the finish he puts to his acting, the light in his eyes, their expression changing with every change of emotion, every phase of thought, the glow of his cheeks, the passion of his voice, so effectively rendered that it brings down the house, the spirit which inspires him. Yes! He seems like one inspired, inspiration springing from an elevated mind; one passion chasing another from his heart. He has

a heart to resolve, a head to contrive and a hand to execute. His inspirations, passions, fire, feeling and force are sublime. Ah! think of a brilliant and enthusiastic audience watching his every look and movement, and admit that the interpreter of genius must, by inspiration of their thoughts, gain some of their nobility. Ah, mother darling, there is no nobler structure than the stage, the music, the lights and the sea of faces set the actor's blood tingling and he is bound to give the best there is in him! I have only to shut my eyes and again my hero stands before me. [Pauses.] Oh, mother, mother dear, shall I send for Robert?

MRS. LAWTON [Thoughtfully]. I will go to the theatre the first night Robert plays. As to your marriage—concentrate on the Doctor all the same, he is the proper man for you, the Doctor, the Doctor!

LOUISE. My Robert is the happy combination of art and nature . . . His conduct of a love scene is an object lesson, and the stage he walks he owns. [Disheartened.] What could you see in the Doctor!

MRS. LAWTON. Ah, this doctor is different. [Playfully.] Concentrate on the Doctor, my dear, the Doctor, the Doctor! Nail him to the counter.

LOUISE [Impatiently]. My dear mother! It is not such a glorious thing to be a doctor! . . . All honest doctors practically admit that drugs can only repress symptoms, they cannot eradicate diseases.

MRS. LAWTON. Doctoring, my dear, is an art, and what do we care about science, since the more appalling the operation, the more the surgeon is paid.

LOUISE. Doctors have to face all kinds of weather at all hours. The worse people are the more they associate with them. . . and their money stops coming in as soon as they stop going out! My Robert is an American in his genius, a cosmopolitan in his attainments, his art.

MRS. LAWTON. I am taken with this doctor as a man, with me it is his charming personal qualities that carry.

[Enter Belinda.]

BELINDA [Excitedly]. He have gone, he've gone!

LOUISE [Inquiringly]. What did you tell him?

BELINDA [Grinning]. "Mrs. can't express her feelings," I says. "Express mine," he says. "I don't want dem"!

MRS. LAWTON [Sternly]. I told you to say I was out.

BELINDA [Grinning]. He heard you and I tol' him. . . I tol' him! My compliments to your Mrs., he says, please be good enough to tell her dat, I *didn't* call. [Enter Robert.]

ROBERT [Studying the expression of their faces as his guide]. My other patient is doing well, I may say remarkably well. [Extending his hand for a flower to Louise.] Don't refuse me one of your beautiful flowers, so long as they are blooming, I will see in them your face.

LOUISE [As she hands him a flower, which he places in his button-hole]. Ah, Doctor, if you had only returned a few moments sooner! . . . We have had a most unwelcomed visitor, who has filled our flat with trunks and boxes. . . . Thank heavens, we are rid of him, but your presence would have been most welcome.

ROBERT. [Playfully.] Nothing would please me more than to be of service to you.

MRS. LAWTON [Gratefully]. Ah, Doctor, you have done enough for us as it is. [Sighs.] What would I have done without you! [Her eyes full of meaning.] Maxie's illness and my own indisposition have cast a gloom over my little Louise, she is rather lonely, would you help me to cheer her up. [Whispering.] Ask her to play something! Please do! [To Louise, meaningly, noticing that Robert is passive.] The Doctor says that a little music would do me most good. Would you mind playing something for me, *for us*. [Pause.] There is a good girl. . . . Let us have a good time, my dears!

LOUISE [Protestingly]. Could not the Doctor speak for himself?

ROBERT [Plaintively]. Your mother is right. I shall be delighted, delighted to hear you! . . .

[Louise plays a popular air, Robert is the first to applaud and to show his enthusiasm.]

LOUISE [To her mother, artfully]. You see, mother dear, the Doctor is the first to express satisfaction that my playing is over.

ROBERT [Aside, to Louise]. Your pianola is out of order. [To Mrs. Lawton, protestingly.] Your daughter's hands are made for the piano. It was charming, my favorite music, my favorite. . . . [To Mrs. Lawton.] She undoubtedly inherited her musical talents from her mother. . . . [Pointedly.] Even her eyes are very much like her mother's. Ah, your daughter needs no eulogy, she speaks for herself.

MRS. LAWTON [Gratified.] Oh, Doctor, you do flatter! . . . [To Louise.] Why not try a duet, you and the Doctor together, dear, it sounds so much more interesting. [Aside, to Louise.] Put the chair and piano stool close together, dearest, [Emphatically.] very close!

[Louise is rather bashful at first, but finally allows her mother to persuade her. Robert and Louise play together, Louise is seated on the piano stool, Robert on a chair near by—Robert touching Louise's hand instead of the keys of the piano most of the time. Robert gets up when the first number is finished. Louise remaining in her seat, Robert placing his hands from behind on her shoulders.]

MRS. LAWTON [Excitedly, clapping her hands]. Encore, encore, encore! [Aside.] They are getting on splendidly! [Louise renews her playing, Robert sits down on piano stool back to back with Louise, imitating piano playing with his fingers up in the air! . . . In an effort to free herself from the heavy weight behind, Louise stops abruptly, then turns around on her stool facing her mother, but Robert is equal

to the occasion and the stool with Robert at one end and Louise at the other revolves several times before Robert, reversing his position, bumps into Louise, then gets up facing her, bus.]

LOUISE [Noticing the delight on her mother's face and that the time is opportune, whispers to Robert]. Kiss me, dear, kiss me... [Louise extends her chin in eager expectation, Robert kisses her a loud kiss, to Mrs. Lawton's amazement and delight.]

LOUISE [Aloud, protestingly]. I like your cheek, sir! [Aside.] Kiss me again! Attend to your business!..

MRS. LAWTON [Aside]. Good!.. *Ensnared, caught, trapped!*

ROBERT [To Mrs. Lawton]. Who says that woman was only a side issue?

LOUISE [Excitedly, aside]. Now the fat is on the fire!

MRS. LAWTON [To Robert, severely]. Oh, this is too much!

ROBERT [Excitedly]. How much is it?

MRS. LAWTON [As above]. I can easily understand your feelings, sir, [Pointedly.] but the liberty you have just taken is only allowed to those who are engaged!.. What are your intentions towards my daughter, sir?

ROBERT [Protestingly]. Believe me mme, nothing could give me greater pleasure than to ask you for her hand, right here and now, but my profession, my profession... [Interrupted.]

MRS. LAWTON [Excitedly]. Yours, like all others, has its advantages and its drawbacks, and after all it is the man, the man alone that counts, professions—fiddlesticks—love is the only price at which true love should be bought, everything else does not matter. [Emphatically.] My daughter loves you... You children have an attachment for one another, that is enough.

LOUISE [Playfully]. Yes, you must make amends, ask mother.

ROBERT. Would I hesitate were it not for my profession?

MRS. LAWTON [Exhausted]. His profession again. [Imploringly.] I am an invalid, sir, but on my knees, on my bended knees, I ask you to consider my daughter's affections for you!

ROBERT [Moved]. You are just the kind of woman I would love to have as my mother-in-law. Believe me, mme, I am deeply touched, but my profession, my pro... [Interrupted.]

LOUISE [Aside.] I say, Bob, you do want a lot of humoring.

MRS. LAWTON. For us women there is only one profession, matrimony. Naturally, I am very anxious that my daughter should marry the man she loves, love lubricates all the affairs of life! Money is nothing... love everything... I care for nothing and am sure of nothing but you...

ROBERT [Revealing his identity to Mrs. Lawton, handing her his card]. My name, my real name.

MRS. LAWTON. By my new Easter hat, can it be... It can... 't's Robert, the actor, the actor, the actor! Emerson, by all that is wonderful!

ROBERT [Boldly]. Robert Emerson... by himself... Yes, Mrs. Lawton, it was I who impersonated your Doctor in the hope of getting nearer acquainted! [Looking straight at her.] I rest my case, and have nothing to take away from or to add to what I have told you.

MRS. LAWTON [Excitedly]. Perhaps, it was you who impersonated the lawyer, and... and... the playwright, you... who smashed my furniture! My blood boils when I think of it! You, the man who filled my soul with fear and... my beautiful rugs with washing blue...!

ROBERT [Compromising on a half truth To Mrs. Lawton, boldly]. You don't suppose that I...

MRS. LAWTON. Well, didn't you?

LOUISE [playfully coming to Robert's rescue]. No, mother dear, [Winking at audience.] Robert is not a wizzard. [To Robert.] Mother has had an unpleasant experience with a playwright and her opinion about his profession is not high.

MRS. LAWTON [To Robert, offering her hand]. Please overlook anything I may have said at a moment of excitement. [Pause.] I could forgive everybody, but not this clumsy man on whose account I may yet be dragged through the law courts and supreme courts of our great land.

ROBERT [Pleasantly]. The prospect of a law suit, does not necessarily mean a case for the Supreme Court, but should you ever get into legal entanglements, take my advice and engage a good lawyer from the very start, law is for the lawyers.

MRS. LAWTON. I suppose it does take a good lawyer to show us how to evade the law, [Pause] to dig into the past and begot the judges... but we were talking of the playwright. What is your opinion about playwrights?

ROBERT. To us actors, playwrights and dramatists are the heroes and apostles of reason, the disciples of truth, who sow the seeds of knowledge and whose thoughts light a flame in the brain of men! They are the leaders who enrich and enoble life, changing heart throbs into songs in their lyrics of flame, holding high the holy torch and filling the world with light.

MRS. LAWTON [Knowingly, but with less confidence]. I happen to know that the two million a year paid to the million of playwrights by American managers would only average two dollars a year each for an author. [Pause.] This hardly corresponds with your high sounding phrases! If actors and managers hold authors in such high esteem,

why don't they do something to enable them to earn bread and cheese while working?

ROBERT [Earnestly]. I am not the attorney for the managers' association or the profession, but it seems to me that a man who has the opportunity to do serious work in this world should thank God for the chance and find the reward in the work itself, in the doing.

LOUISE [Approvingly]. This is the proper spirit, my dear, the only one, in fact which makes dramatic work in America possible.

MRS. LAWTON [Dubiously]. There is merit in your statement, only some authors may fail to make their grocer, butcher, baker and candlestick maker accept it as legal tender and as payment in full!... As to you, sir...there is nothing to ask, I have already indicated that I give my consent.

.....

LOUISE. After careful reflection, mother has learned to consider members of your profession among the foremost people of practical usefulness. [To her mother.] You might have surmised from Robert's mannerism, you simpleton, that he was something more than a mere doctor.

ROBERT [Protestingly]. Far be it from me to say anything more against a profession which at least on this momentous occasion has served me so admirably and so well.

MRS. LAWTON. Don't spoil Robert, my dear. History tells us that Daniel is the only man who was not spoiled by being lionized!... As to doctors, when you will have to do with them as much as I had during the period of a lifetime, you will admit that they are the best-mannered men.

ROBERT [Approvingly]. Quite right, mother, whatever may be said against drugs and leg cutting, no class of men in our community, with the exception of my own profession, have learned so admirably and so well the art of pleasing. Show me a doctor with a lucrative practice and I will accordingly show you the polished man.

LOUISE [Admiringly]. On the stage Robert is called upon to impersonate all sorts of people and to say all sorts of things, but off the stage he has a pleasant thought and a kind word for everybody.

ROBERT [Plaintively]. My views are simple and very far from regarding as a lullaby of lies the triumphs of civilization; above all I feel that all kinds of work necessary for public good, become honorable by being necessary.

MRS. LAWTON [Inquiringly]. All kinds of work, even promoters. [Confidingly.] A promoter offered Maxie for sale some waterfront lots by the quart. [Pause.] Is this also a useful profession?

ROBERT [Earnestly]. My dear [ahem] mother, when Watt saw the steam lifting the lid of his mother's tea kettle, he saw beyond that

fireplace the steam engine propelling ships and drawing cars, but how far from his mother's steam kettle would Watt's invention have traveled without the business promoter? When I see the giant called steam turning with tireless arm the countless wheels of toil or hear the electric spark flashing under all the waves of the sea, when I consider electricity which has emancipated the mind from the body, and given it wings, in fact when I contemplate all the latest discoveries which have brought the world into one family and made intelligence independent of distance, *there is a warm spot in my heart for the business promoter.*

LOUISE [Sympathetically]. Yes, yes.

ROBERT. There is a long distance between the suspended spiders web floating in your path and our suspended Brooklyn Bridge. Without the aid of skilled promoters Sir Samuel Brown would surely have lost the way.

MRS. LAWTON. This and more I have learned to-day... professions in themselves are little or nothing, and after all it is the man himself that counts.

ROBERT [Playfully]. I accept your apology. [Shaking Mrs. Lawton's hand affectionately.] I forgive you, mother, for everything I did and will do my best to make Louise happy.

LOUISE [Embracing Robert]. My life is yours.

ROBERT [Taking out a jewel box from his breast coat pocket and displaying jewel, which in size, workmanship and quality commands attention]. Pray, forgive my seeming negligence. This jewel, intended as a trifling remembrance on your birthday, has been making a hole in my pocket ever since. [Handing her the jewel.]

LOUISE [Accepting the jewel, both women admiring it]. It is doubly welcome tonight.

[Enter Maxie in his shirt sleeves and without a collar, a rolled up large print of a painting in his right hand.]

[Extending his arm, waving print in the air]. While waiting for my onion porridge and during the time the onions were cooling, I have made a rough sketch of my next painting [displaying a large print from a familiar painting of the American fleet in full swing] and I know the man who will buy it. [Digging Robert in the rib]. Do you get me, Steve?

MRS. LAWTON [Looking persistently and excitedly through her eye-glass]. Not at all bad for half an hour's work, not at all bad.

ROBERT. Maxie certainly knows how to throw the bull!...

MAXIE [Taking in the situation gaily]. I have completely recovered, mother dear. It may seem improbable but it is true. I will not need the operation, but you will need a minister. It is quite proper

for you mother dear to pay for the medicine, but the doctor's visits we should return.

MRS. LAWTON [Making an unsuccessful effort to get at his ear]. The doctor has done excellently, he shall be paid in full!

MAXIE [Protestingly]. As a patient who has been on his best behavior I claim half the reward.

ROBERT [Patting him on the shoulder]. And as the star actor of our little comedy drama with its happy ending, you well deserve it. You shall have it all. It is I who pays the bill!

LOUISE [Refraining him]. No, Robert dear, it is I who pays, for I am the greatest gainer!

MRS. LAWTON [Getting up from the couch for the first time during this scene more to her personal gratification and amazement than that of all the others present, who unnoticed by Mrs. Lawton exchange glances; protestingly]. It is I who pays and pays gladly! [To Robert]. In you I gain a son, . . . not merely a husband for my daughter. [Admiringly]. You are not merely a star among actors, but a star among marriageables.

ROBERT [To Mrs. Lawton]. Thank you [then to Louise], examining Mrs. Lawton's dress]. Isn't mother's dress a stunner, and how well it becomes her! . . .

MRS. LAWTON [Embraces Robert and Louise, from behind placing her right hand on Robert's shoulder and her left on Louise's]. As a son-in-law I regard you as an excellent investment.

MAXIE [Overjoyed, jumps on the couch, waving his arm and handkerchief, to Robert] you may take her as your wife, but send the presents direct to me.

BELINDA [Enters with refreshments]. The goose hangs high. . . [Placing tray on table—noticing the position, grinning]. She threw dem all for de hector! Golly, ain't it funny how dem dings turn out sometimes, ain't funny, ain't it?

ROBERT. We are all here. . . one kind innocent little fact I miss. . . Topsy! [Pause] It is such a delightful pleasure to have her about.

[All taking up their glasses.]

MAXIE [On the couch, glass in hand]. "To my future brother-in-law, the friendliest of men, who takes the part of others so well and always succeeds in making up, the man of men who gets paid for playing. . . [Exit Belinda to kitchen.]

LOUISE [Protestingly]. To Robert who works while he plays! . . .

MRS. LAWTON [Smilingly lifting her glass]. To Robert who plays while he works and to the engaged pair, may good fortune shine upon them and meet them everywhere; to my future son-in-law, America's leading ambassador to the entertaining world.



[Belinda returns with Topsy in her arms, Louise hands her a glass of wine.]

BELINDA [All excitement, as she accepts the glass from Louise]. To de brightgroom...de favorite, of all de feminins and to de happy pair, may your floors be paved wid pancakes, may all your pipes run of milk and honey and de ceiling be covered with watermillions. [Extending her glass to the dog...but drinks it quickly when Topsy is ready to taste it.]

MAXIE [To Belinda]. Ah, Belinda, my honey, you are a jewel and the hope of the colored race!...

ROBERT [Lifting his glass to Mrs. Lawton]. I thank you, my dear mother and friends, I thank you!...[Eyeing Louise] I lift my glass to the sister of the graces in the temple of love, where all men worship, to her who shares our sorrow and doubles our joy, God's best gift to men, the source of help, happiness and heaven, to our women, our women, God bless them!...

CURTAIN.

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